



JACK PERKINS

THE PULSE OF DARKNESS

by EDWARD NOBLE

THE PULSE OF DARKNESS

By Edward Noble

IN this Conradian story of romance, mystery, and adventure, Edward Noble, the author of 'Moving Waters,' has written a tale of great beauty and exotic fascination.

Mysterious judgment for an ancient crime pursued the ship *Kow-Loon*. When the story opens, Harold Grey, a seasoned young officer, has taken command of her on the death of the captain, and has brought her into port. There the agents put in Harold's place a new man, Shadara Williams, a Eurasian, fanatically pious, and resentful of the young Englishman's power with the crew. In the face of danger, Shadara takes to prayers and whisky, and finally becomes violent. Harold imprisons him, takes command, and the story develops swiftly to the startling climax.

Edward Noble has had long and varied experience on all sorts of ships. He wrote his first novel in a roadstead of South America. He sailed and wandered for ten years, in Australia, South America, and the East. In the '90's he met Conrad and later Henry James, gave up wandering, and has written ever since except during the war years, when he served in the British Navy.



**THE PULSE OF
DARKNESS**

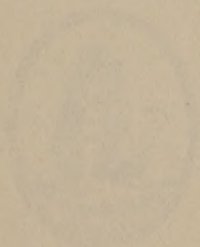
REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.

*Archive
Collection*



* *
This book may not leave the Office
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days

THE PULSE OF DARKNESS



Other Books by Edward Noble

THE EDGE OF CIRCUMSTANCE
WAVES OF FATE
THE LADY NAVIGATORS
FISHERMAN'S GAT
THE GRAIN CARRIERS
LORDS OF THE SEA
CHAINS
'THE VICAR OF NORMANTON
LIFTED CURTAINS
DUST FROM THE LOOM
THE BOTTLE-FILLERS
OUTPOSTS OF THE FLEET
THE NAVAL SIDE
THE MANDARIN'S BELL
THE FIRE OF SPRING
MOVING WATERS

EDWARD NOBLE

THE PULSE OF DARKNESS

A TALE OF EASTERN SEAS

“Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?”

GOETHE



BOSTON · AND NEW · YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

THE
PULSE OF DARKNESS
A TALE OF EASTERN ADVENTURE



The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE GATEWAY	7
II. THE JOSS-PIDGIN	15
III. MUSIC	25
IV. THE COMING OF DUST	37
V. WHAT OF THE NIGHT?	48
VI. WHAT WOULD YOU DO?	68
VII. NICHT WAHR?	90
VIII. THE GEYSER	101
IX. OUT BOATS!	120
X. GREY'S HANDICAP	130
XI. PEARLY NIGHT	140
XII. ULAR IKAN	159
XIII. THE CHIEF'S CABIN	173
XIV. AT FAULT	191
XV. THE LETTER	201
XVI. THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN	214
XVII. "ERL-KING"	220
XVIII. THE INDENTURES	247
XIX. THE MESSAGE	259
XX. HOMEWARD BOUND	279

THE PULSE OF DARKNESS

CHAPTER I

THE GATEWAY

TO Harold Grey, who was born, as he put it, within sound of the gongs on Shwe Dagon—or, as one other explained, on *Kow-Loon* herself—ships were a matter of course. If you hadn't a ship you couldn't go anywhere, and as he together with Dad and Mums was always going somewhere, the ship's cabins, poop and quarter-deck; her officers, the bo'sun's whistle; her alleyways, capstan, pumps and boats belonged to him as certainly as any nursery, home, garden and perambulator can belong to a child who sees the light first in, for instance, the houses opposite Hyde Park or Kensington Gardens. In one essential he shared in the upbringing which falls to the lot of all Anglo-Indian children—an ayah with a singular red spot on her forehead carried him, hugged him and sometimes when the ship stooped suddenly, as suddenly sat pressing him to her, chuckling strange words in his ears as though he were her own, which he was not: an ayah who braved *Kala pani* for his sake and laughed when the spray of it christened him in the Bay of Bengal.

Naturally, therefore, when the boy was grown too great to require an ayah's cuddling, he transferred his confidence and his worship to the ship which carried him. Brought his toys—very few they were and strange—to a little nook on the quarter-deck where a brass gun stood on its carriage and poked its nose out to look at the sea. Here he could play when no one interfered,

watch the scupper which sometimes spouted " 'elicious white water what gurgled," and sometimes, when he had successfully cajoled a quartermaster, borrow a flag to dress his gun.

There came a day, though, when these trifles no longer amused ; when the scupper became a nuisance and the gun on the quarter-deck reminded him of the gun on the poop which must be polished always before eight bells, when in other words, grown nearly as large as the youngest midshipman, he stole aloft and sat for the first time high above the spray which had so often tasted salt on his cheek, and looked at the sea—*Kala pani* as some called it ; *Tor-obo* others ; but they were Hillmen ; men from beyond Lahore and Amritsar where no sea comes and ships or sailors are unknown—men with black, curled beards, fierce eyes, who wore turbans and carried a knife so large the child called it a sword.

Then, when all these joys began to grow stale, he went to berth in the midshipmen's quarters ; had a great sea-chest with coach-whipped handles, inside the lid of which was a little wash-basin, fixed so that if he poured too lavishly from his allowance, the water would spill and spray his clothes. A looking-glass was fixed also on the lid of this chest and beneath it was a large wavy blue ribbon painted from side to side with *cave canem* in green block letters, near the centre, which required definition, shading it was termed, that the artist had carried out in red. High up was a bunch of three flags, called " the colours "—the red, white and blue ensigns of all ships worth note—grouped on either side of a shield. And below the shield a pile of round shot making a rigid triangle for the base.

Altogether at that time the lid of his chest entranced the boy very nearly as much as the red spot, or the white spot, which sometimes he had been able to reach above the ayah's nose.

There were intervals in this subconscious drama of events and things, when he lived in a house with other chalk-faced children and was laughed at for his bronze. Then he strove to find the ship which had been his home, came far and found water just as one in authority espied him and showed him the end of a rattan which on further acquaintance he acknowledged must be master—as far as *Tor-obo* was concerned. For it was indeed black water and the tank as deep as the pit in which Shaitan made his home.

Perhaps luckily for Harold Grey these intervals were small; for it must be admitted both father and mother loved the sea as he did.

Now the ship herself, built in 1835, was a survival of John Company's palmiest days, and may therefore have held latent within her the mysticism or the Taoism, which you will, without which nothing is dreamed and fashioned in the East. In any case, there, carven on the teak shield which formed her escutcheon, was the mystic invocation of Buddhist lands, perhaps by order of the Lord Buddha himself—"Om! *Mani padme, hum*"—standing above the quarter-deck where men muster in watches before going aloft to fight a gale; or as a preliminary to "falling in" for Action Stations and running out the guns in answer to the challenge of an enemy. "Om! *Mani padme, hum*," which must be said before a man starts his praying-wheel, said fast as it revolves and again when it ceases to turn, otherwise the cry will reach no Throne;

which a bonze pausing beside *Kow-Loon* in Bangkok uttered before passing. Possibly he had orders thus to greet her ; perhaps it came spontaneously because of her splendid bearing, the tier of guns peeping through ports which delighted him as he went shuffling past, clad over one shoulder in the yellow robe of his sacred office—mystic, inscrutable. All this and more occurred in 1837 ; what follows happened forty-five years later when *Kow-Loon* no longer was a child and the Pulse of Darkness stood over her.

The gateway to China Sea for ships coming up from the south or from Sunda is Carimata Strait, and here, near Flying Fish Reef, Captain Downes died while on a passage from Batavia to Shanghai, leaving Harold Grey, his Chief Officer, in command. It may be that the Captain was just obeying known laws, for he was old and Java fever had weakened him ; yet there are other laws before which he and those who eighteen months later passed through the Western Gate may have bowed. For in these regions fire and water wage an eternal warfare, and “ the dragon ” in its lashings in far-off Japan may have caused the disaster. Yet may it not well be that they all moved in the shadow of Influences which cannot be analysed, sometimes are misapplied, and often are so paraded before those who would see through the Gates of Death, that Searchers are more ready to scoff than to believe.

Now, to speak by the book, *Kow-Loon*, halted there at the edge of Carimata Strait in February 1882 to bury her dead, had nothing of the spook about her ; nor was she related in any way to the *Flying Dutchman*.

In actual appearance she had the haughty air of a frigate; the straight spars, short poles and blunt trucks of those vessels which in Nelson's day carried out the duties of our cruisers, and were as daring. Yet because of the hour, the singular radiance of a glowing sunset, and the unusual duty which had halted her, she had an air of etherealism which belonged indubitably to the East, all of it enhanced by the borrowed mysticism which came of the night.

Yet not because she was holy or mystic, but because she was staunch, her people had faith in her; faith in spite of the fact that her guns were ripped out of her and she lay bare of defence where pirates abound, her mainyard square, while Downes waited on his sloped plank before an open port, as is the way with seamen who face their end. . . . An East Indiaman in point of fact she was, tradition in every line—her crew men steeped in the wiles of Eastern seas, plastic, singularly alive to portents.

Her ports no longer showed cannon or tompion. Indeed they were closed more often than triced to show her teeth; but her ensign, drooping at half-mast, was the same—red as the sunset standing over her; red as the windward side of her masts, her rails, wheel, binnacle, all of them aglow in company with the brass gratings which screened her skylights and companion.

Grey—young, blue-eyed, strong, who was her Chief, stood with his brother at the head of the plank reading the pathetic service for those who are buried at sea. Grey, on whom the command had devolved, seeing through half-closed eyes the Pali-Sanscrit *Hail! Imperator* he had known from childhood, while

giving utterance to the committal phrase of this "our dear brother" and signalling his men to tilt the plank.

All this appealed very vividly to these two brothers, Harold and Raffles Grey, for not very far north of where *Kow-Loon* now lay with her mainyard aback, they had clung to the ground with two anchors down while great seas strove to carry her to the reefs which were to leeward.

Sorisha, a ship of the same line, bore them then. From London to China Sea she came under command of Grey's father; there met a typhoon which dismasted her and pushed her back upon Carimata where the Captain died suddenly at the hands of an assassin. Even as he gave orders which saved the ship he died. Far off the typhoon thundered and only the hurricane seas were left—yet here Grey died, leaning upon the lashing which held him to the rigging. No one saw him fall. No one knew that he was dead, for the night was black, the wind half a gale from the north, the first and third officers forward with a watch clearing the anchors; the second mate with his watch in the waist directing men who were setting a new trysail; while the music of a charge, of horses galloping against time, rang from the opened scuttle on the poop deck.

In the end the Chief, waiting on the fo'c'sle amidst blinding spray for orders to "let go," decided to see why his Captain had not sent them. He found him dead . . . but because the ship was very near Carimata Island and the reefs which lie near, he instantly took command, dropped the port anchor, veered her to leeward under the trysail and let go the

starboard. Then when the ship was made snug they came aft, unlashd their dead, examined his hurts, and presently carried him into the presence of his wife—there in the after cabin where she had encouraged others with her music of a galloping horse which fought with Death.

And now Harold Grey was reading the Committal Sentences over poor Downes who had succeeded to the command of *Kow-Loon*, reading too with half-closed eyes what was known to him as the Pali-Sanscrit prayer which he had learned as a boy. Harold Grey who would command the ship where it was written; Harold Grey whose mother was of Connemara, the girl-wife of eighteen who soon after her marriage went down to kiss the Blarney Stone and earn its gift of honeyed speech; who in the after years accompanied her husband and filled men's minds with the magic of her songs . . . often had lulled Grey as he lay in his bunk and driven him to sleep against his will. So too with Raffles, whom she called little Billee, the brother who stood beside him now, his eyes dim with tears.

Was it Fate, or was it just fortuitous? Grey asked and found no answer. True, the Pulse of Darkness was not far distant, and that is not fortuitous . . . nor was the prayer which is no prayer that stood above them.

Grey was not conscious the question arose. Possibly he did not know he read the prayer—yet he had learned it while playing on *Kow-Loon's* decks, before that disastrous voyage in *Sorisha*.

In harbour and at sea he had captured its meaning, and had seen the holy shrinking of the Hindu as he

breathed the mystic *Aum*,* the reverence in which the nations held it. Sometimes he had gained his knowledge from men learned in Eastern tongues, sometimes from folk who merely chattered, sometimes from servants sitting on their heels with an eye on the Captain-Sahib's man-child who one day would order them . . . caught, too, something of the mysticism of those who were his teachers.

* *Aum* or *Om*.

CHAPTER II

THE JOSS-PIDGIN

NOW when this service was accomplished they moved away north and came to Shanghai where Grey, being qualified, was confirmed in his command and again sailed. Thus for the next eighteen months he maintained his lordship, carrying out charters which set *Kow-Loon* humming now to Sydney, thence to Batavia and thence again finally to Calcutta and Hong-Kong.

As skipper undoubtedly Grey was a success. He had a clean sheet, no trouble with his crew, no stranding nor loss of spars, and the ship had made good passages. He had taken leaves from the book of the splendid seaman who had preceded him and from his father's journals. *Kow-Loon* was a "comfortable ship," the fo'c'sle band and shanty-men were of the best. In the dog-watch when in harbour the crew sat often under their awning to sing the old sea-songs as few crews could, men who now sit to hear the brazen jodellings of a gramophone. Cheers came over the bay from unseen friends, and sometimes those who rowed on still evenings would lie on their oars to listen before passing. Raffles, too, when he played in the after cabin drew audiences as he continued to practise during Downes' command. Both the brothers loved music and Downes fostered it. Music came to them as sketching comes to one born to it. "Anyone," the Captain insisted, "can be a sailor, but few have your talent ashore or afloat. See you make something of it."

That had been his advice on the boy's first voyage, yet Raffles had come again and again—because consciously or unconsciously other influences than

those for music ran in his blood. "That a boy so endowed should waste his time learning to use a marlin-spike," Downes growled shortly before his death, "is little short of criminal. Take him out of it when you get home."

With the ordinary type of skipper it is doubtful if Raffles would have made the headway he did. It was Downes who influenced him, told him he was tired of books and wanted to rest his eyes; sent him into the cabin to play. Often when Grey was on watch the skipper would say to him: "Is that brother of yours doing anything important?" And if, as usually happened, the Chief said "No," he would add: "Then send him into the after-cabin and tell him to play those 'lieder'—Mendelssohn, you know, not Schubert to-night."

Which meant, as Grey had learnt, that the old man was less fit and wanted help. Later still, when he was near the end, it was the "Moonlight Sonata" he desired and Raffles gave. He said it took him through the Gates.

Now, soon after *Kow-Loon* arrived finally at Hong-Kong, rumours were set going that a change was to be made in the command. Grey having heard nothing from his agents refused to consider it until one day at the Club a friend blurted the question direct. Naturally he was hurt, yet, as nothing transpired until the ship was nearly ready for sea, he could make no protests. On the following day, however, a clerk came down from the office and handed him a letter which stated that a new man would be appointed to take the ship home—and the crew, when it came to their ears,

decided they would have no new skipper ; decided, in point of fact, to clear out if one were appointed and be damned to it.

Sailors object to a change in command during a voyage. They say it is synonymous to changing horses while crossing a stream—not, you understand, because they suppose it to be indicative of bad luck ; but because they prefer to sail with the devil they know rather than with the devil they don't know. When Captain Downes died the change was mitigated by the fact that already the crew know both devils. Now, after eighteen months of splendid harmony the change would produce hymns. Word had come that the new skipper was a Welshman, and the men in heated language declared that they would as lief sail with a Scot. Then it appeared he had a flair for prayer meetings and would hold forth for an hour on end. And, finally, some person wise in longshore chatter reported he had left his last ship because otherwise he would have been thrown out. . . . In any case, they said, " What's wrong with our old man " (Grey) " and what's going to happen about him ? Will he take on the job of Chief or chuck in his hand ? " In other words, would he still stick to the ship or go ashore ?

They talked noisily of going aft in a body to ask the old man what he would do, but desisted on advice from the Afterguard. These people had no use for madness. They knew what they knew and had no mind to risk the loss of a good crew in a port where it would be easy to procure a worse.

So, the discussion waxed and waned, sometimes inclining one way, sometimes another. Later it became

evident the men would have some difficulty in persuading the Agents to pay them off. They laughed at that, yet presently discovered it true. It would be impossible "to go ashore out of her" without also leaving their pay.

Finally, Grey learned that much as the Agents regretted it, his supersession was essential. A great gun came from the office to smooth the way. It appeared that the senior partner considered Grey too young, much too young to take the ship home. "Out here," he said in effect, "it is all very well—monsoons, trades and the rest ; but *Channel* you know, and *fogs* in winter time require an experience you have not had. We should not feel justified in permitting it without direct instructions from Home."

This, of course, was out of the question. Cables on a subject of such difficulty were costly, as Grey would understand. In the end, therefore, they appointed a man who whatever else he might be, certainly was not young. For the second time, therefore, horses were to be swapped while crossing a stream ; yet when the men heard this they decided to "hang on." The alternative was to desert "and leave their pay to the shore Gang."

In his interview with the Agents Grey had been advised to resign and accept the Jardine Mathieson offer *if* he felt very keenly on the matter. "Think it out, Captain, and let me know to-morrow what you will do. Personally, I hope you will take your old berth again. Of course, I see your point, *but*, I may say, we are representing your capital record out here, and, I think, you will find your owners not ungrateful if you consent. I don't think you will have any

difficulty with the new man. He's a bit staid and a crank about religion."

"Has he sailed in any of ours before, sir?" Grey asked.

"I think so. *Sorisha*, I fancy, long ago."

"Um! I saw him at the Club. He didn't seem like one of our crowd."

"I know. But we have no choice. I gather he has been in the South American trade mainly, but his papers are excellent. So—you'll give me your decision—and don't blame us for the change entirely, please."

There were people in Hong-Kong who openly criticized this appointment. They said that Captain Williams would never have got the ship but for the fact that he had been so long on the beach his friends were anxious to cash his I.O.U.'s. Apart from that, in spite of the crew's objection, he scarcely seemed dangerous. Indeed he appeared too placid to attempt to bullyrag men who had sailed so long together; but they argued from hearsay.

The first whisper of actuality came from the ship's Comprador, a fat and urbane Chinaman, who described their new lord as "all-ee samee Joss-pidgin."* In the vernacular it sounded even less wholesome, yet the men were more disturbed by the dim suggestion of merriment peeping through the Comprador's eyes than by the Chinese monosyllables. Still, in the background there remained their pay-day—a stumbling-block of two years' growth, two and a half by the time they reached home. In terms of coinage, perhaps eighty pounds apiece for the seamen alone. No. In

* A preacher or missionary, or merely a convert.

cold blood it was unthinkable. Grey, if he had heard they considered it, would have put his fiat on the madness.

Now, as it happened four days before the ship sailed, Raffles, who had been tuning the piano, was still in the after-cabin and thundering out Schubert's wonderful accompaniment to the *Erl-King*. The stern ports were wide to the bay, a sampan not far off carrying a white-topped umbrella. The Joss-pidgin, in other words, having signed on, had come down to look at his ship. He sat in the sampan, a scowl on features invisible to all; forgetful of the damp hot breath of the monsoon, of the beads of sweat trickling off gleaming coolie backs, of "the young gentleman" on gangway whose duty it was to report his advent—forgetful of the fact that he was the Joss-pidgin.

It happened in consequence that the sampan was close to the gangway before the midddy tumbled to the fact that beneath that green-lined umbrella was his future lord. Just then Williams tilted it and looked up at his ship. Instantly all was bustle on board. The midddy making his report, the Chief's whistle followed by the bo'sun's call—then, "Hands lay aft! Muster!"

In Grey's pocket was a note from the Agents saying that Captain S. Williams would visit the ship and would take over the command during the forenoon. Well, and here came his Majesty, screened like a Baboo; or Parsee of Bombay. Grey stood there troubled in two ways, first because he was surrendering command, second, and far more aggravating, he could not decide what the S. stood for. Captain S. Williams—he tested them one by one—Samuel, Saul, Samson, Simeon; became angry, said "Devil take it, isn't

there an English name to fit the . . .” Um ! Stephen . . . Solomon . . . Phut !——” He turned to search the boat. It was alongside, the sampan boys struggling to keep their charge dry shod, “*tu-ne-ab mah*,” sliding in presence of a Joss-pidgin who heeded not, nor turned away to smile.

Grey, watching, said it was a portent. Captain S. Williams was climbing the ladder carrying the evil thing in face of a crew stifling laughter. Obviously the man was *drabb*,* his mother’s word. Elgar, the second officer, whispered that he looked like a Ceylonese Moor coming to sell his wares at Colombo. A green shadow fell across the man’s face as he emerged upon the deck with tilted gamp to acknowledge the salute of his officers.

They saw a man with singularly long arms and Hebraic features, blue-black eyes—cold, sad, sunken beneath bristling brows in a forest of black hair. They saw he was swarthy and had the tinge of one a long while dead, and commented one to the other—“that’s wot the Chink meant ; Jew—wi’ his Joss-pidgin.” Balmy, was their verdict given *con amore* because of the umbrella—while Williams, standing to appraise them, raised the long fingers of one hand and said with a singing inflection :

“I heard someone banging on a piano, apparently in my state-room, as I came alongside. I suppose it is the ship’s piano ?” Then his eyes fell on Grey.

“No, sir, it is mine,” Grey answered at once. “Captain Downes was fond of music and asked me to let it remain that my brother might play to him.”

“Who is Captain Downes ?”

* Worthless—Irish.

"He commanded the ship until we came up from Batavia. He died in Carimata Strait, and I have been in command ever since."

"Where is your brother who plays?"

Grey pointed to him as he stood in his place for inspection.

"Hum! And you are Chief Officer?"

"Until you take over I am Captain, sir."

"That I do now. What is your name?"

"Grey."

His eyes had never left the Chief's face, nor did they leave it now. The man's colour had a greenish tinge—perhaps from the umbrella; but his eyes said that he was amazed, uncertain, angry. Then came an order: "I wish to speak to the one who plays. Call him."

Grey signalled Raffles and he stepped out of line to approach.

"That will do. Stand. How old are you?"

"Sixteen, sir."

"Where did you learn the piano?"

"My mother taught me——"

"What! What!——"

Raffles repeated the sentence and the skipper waved him off. "That will do." Again he lifted an apostolic hand and marched with Grey to inspect the crew. At the group of midshipmen and officers he paused and said to Raffles: "Music is for the worship of God—that I heard was for the devil. Understand?"

He passed on and in Grey rose a whirlwind rage, the vision of an ape and the Buddhist *mantra* all inextricably mixed to torture him. Then once again, to calm him, the skipper halted and, pointing at a member of

the crew, said: "You! What country d'you hail from?" At which Grey stared.

"Chinee, please, seh. I all-ee samee cook."

"I see you have no tail. As a Chinese you will understand why I asked."

The words were cutting. Not even a Chinese cook could miss his meaning. He leaned out clucking: "Please, seh—gettee cuttin' off in 'Melica. Man steal my money, tail cuttee off. *Tu-ne-ab mah!*" he gobbled it, growing white with passion. "S'an'hai me one time . . . no ketchee clothes . . . tail no wanchee glow no mo' . . ."

"That will do. Any lie suffices, eh, Mister Mate?" He looked up sidelong to catch the Chief's applause.

"As it happens, it is true," Grey tossed back, brusque as his commander. Williams continued his tour without further remark while all hands were tittering. The cook was one of those folk who sometimes induce mirth on a ship, sometimes swear-words. At the moment his eyes and attitude seemed aimed to produce hysteria in a crew accustomed to order. The skipper stopped that by turning round and letting the umbrella fall over his shoulder. "In future," he said, "you will understand I am Captain," paused and put in an addenda: "A man may be of the Elect, yet fail to win the respect of those he commands. Dismiss!"

It sounded like the knell Grey seemed to visualize as a result of his lapse into mysticism, and upon it leaped his mother's comment in the phrase of Ireland—"drabh!"

Naturally among a body of men many made a guess at what the Elect meant: but Grey was under no delusion. Elgar, in the awkward pause, said, "When

in doubt, sir, play trumps," which may have had some far-off bearing on the point. Williams chose to ignore it. His eyes and beard assumed the sneer men presently learned to associate with annoyance. It rarely vanished, and it was the precursor of squalls on the day when he twitted Grey with being fey.

Meanwhile he stepped briskly up the main-deck and drifted at once into the sterile talk of men engaged in sizing each other up. As they proceeded on their tour of inspection the umbrella frequently became entangled, yet the Captain's language remained orthodox. An ominous sign. A sign of greater portent than the umbrella. Grey, walking circumspectly beside him, evolved at once the meaning of Elect. "Well—did it not approximate to the Joss-pidgin touch of that Comprador?" The officers made their reading similarly; the Afterguard theirs, the crew theirs—and for once all hands were agreed.

They said that Hong-Kong knew the ropes as well as most ports; and in metaphor that Hong-Kong was well advised to interest itself in Captain Williams' translation. Later they qualified that statement. Grey had been at the Club and had learned in answer to questions that the man's first name was neither Samuel nor any other of those he had dreamed, but Shâhdara—which he knew was beyond the river at Lahore; the tomb of the drunken Shahjehan and the beautiful woman who after long years became his wife.

Shâhdara—clipped to Shadara—Shadara Williams.

Hence the blue-black hair and beard, the tallow skin, the Parsee semblance. . . . Hence, too, the beginnings of certain whimsies which came to Grey, as he said, "from the back of Beyond."

CHAPTER III

MUSIC

IT was the evening of a day following the instalment of the new skipper and Grey sat in his cabin resolving the issue. Without, the sou'-west monsoon blew gustily in squalls ; the air was damp, the furniture clammy. Rain had ceased since four o'clock and a moist breeze swept in through the open port. Yet it failed to cool the Chief who leaned back on his settee burdened by a new irresolution, "What the devil am I going to do?" the tenor of it.

At the moment he was Captain ; but to-morrow he would be Chief, carrying out the orders of a person known in Hong-Kong as a Joss-pidgin . . . known in some subtle fashion to Grey himself, as memories crowded to give him pictures of the days when he played on *Sorisha's* decks.

The tragedy of *Sorisha* had been far from Grey's mind when talking with the Agent. It happened nearly thirteen years ago, and last night, when looking into his father's journal, he discovered it stopped abruptly with the coming typhoon. What happened afterwards no one knew. How long Grey's father had been dead before they discovered him supported by a lashing which held him in the mizzen rigging was unknown. No wound was found when they cut him down. The ship's doctor had stated that death was caused by strangulation. He pointed to certain marks, freckles that gave him that clue ; but Grey remembered someone challenged that, saying the doctor was very young and had much to learn.

He remembered, too, the terrible stress of the hour ; the ship driving dismasted and unmanageable before

the gale. The darkness when night fell. The confusion in the cabins and cuddy where passengers were gathered expecting every moment the ship would strike. He remembered especially the wailing of an amah over her sick charge . . . the silence of the men, the splendid courage of the women; but over and above all he recollected the boom of seas which swept across the ship as she lolled there nearly on her broadside.

It all came back to Grey as he sat there uncertain as yet what he must do; came back bit by bit, one memory leading to another until the mosaic was nearly complete.

He had spoken lately to his officers, Elgar and Cobham, who begged him to remain; but he had said nothing of Williams or the *Sorisha's* voyage, for the command he had been offered he discovered was contingent on his agreeing to serve for a year as Chief, in one of the Company's coast boats. This he was unable to consider. It would keep him in the East when he had promised to give up sailing ships on his return home, and he would be compelled to leave Raffles in *Kow-Loon*—which he refused to do. The decision entirely hinged on this, for since the death of her husband Mrs Grey could no longer face the sea with the old trust. Had it not taken him in his prime? Would it be any less exacting with her sons? Billee, in any case, must be safeguarded during the last year of his term, then come home and give up the sea.

On Grey's knees as he sat there considering his future was the letter written by Mums, as they called her, which had reached him when he arrived at Hong-

Kong. Very strongly were these three knit—Mums, Raffles, Harold—now they were fatherless.

A very gentle lady, their mother who had strayed from Connemara's shores, kissed the Blarney Stone, and married the Captain of an Indiaman when a girl of eighteen. How young and alluring, how full of Celtic fire she was, how avid to see the world, they had learned in those spacious days of Merchant Ships, when voyage after voyage they sailed together in *Kow-Loon*. Sailed as children and as boys; learning something of music and sailor lore; of their Mother's splendid songs aft there in the cabin where Raffles sometimes played—learned, too, that of late she had given rein to fear and now dreaded the sea which was their home.

All these events belonged to the past, and the present was in harness to it.

Grey had been writing to her, telling her of his setback and his consequent indecision. It had seemed easy to say he would resign when he began, but he found it would not be easy. How could he leave Raffles? At the moment the boy was playing the accompaniment to the *Doppleganger*; a little while since the galloping rhythm of *Erl-King* had startled a silent canary in the cuddy to vie with it once and for all. Now that Raffles played more quietly the bird no longer sang. He would be hopping about his cage, indifferent, Grey mused. Perhaps he remembered the mother's voice! Singular, in any case.

The boy presently passed and glanced in on his brother. "I have a jolly good mind to chuck the sea when I get home, Harold—music's so wonderful. Think Mums would mind?"

"No—it's what she lives for, and I will back you if necessary. What's the use of having Bach at your fingers' ends if you have to dabble with ropes and tar? Where are you going?"

"Nearly three bells, sir. We have to 'clear up' and pump her out."

"Right. Wait a minute. Close the door and come here."

Raffles obeyed and crossed to stand beside his brother. "Anything wrong?" he asked.

"No—but I've been thinking. I'm puzzled by that man—Williams, the new skipper—ever since I saw him," he said, and paused. "Do you remember anything at all of the *Sorisha*?"

"*Sorisha*! No—why?"

"Remember either of the officers, for instance? Think."

"No—not very well."

"Had the second mate longish arms and a beard?"

"He had a beard, for I remember they sang 'Hairy Johnny' instead of 'Hanging Johnny' in that shanty. You remember I used to sit in the middle of the capstan when they were heaving things, and the men did not like him."

"Who—the second mate?"

"Yes—why?"

"Was his name Williams?"

Raffles shook his head. "No—I'm afraid I was too young to notice that."

"Probably. Well, what else did you discover?"

"That Mums couldn't bear him."

"Why?"

"She said his eyes were cruel."

"Do you remember Dad saying anything . . . any row, for instance?"

"No." Raffles had no recollection.

"One day on the poop," Grey urged, "before we had passed the Cocos, coming up towards Sunda, *you* were playing down to leeward. I was aft watching the quartermaster . . . Dad and the second mate were to windward near the break of the poop. Can't you remember anything?"

Again Raffles signalled his lack of memory. "I was very little then, Harold. Not four, was I?"

"Not quite. No, I agree one couldn't expect it. I thought it just possible you might help me a bit. . . . You see I was only twelve myself—yet it seemed possible that between us we could make sure of one or two things. I've been writing to Mums—some affair brought up by that man mentioning the *Sorisha* . . . and, well, I was telling her about this promotion of mine. I had to naturally . . ."

"I hate it," Raffles broke in, "more than you do. So do the men."

"I know. But we mustn't show it, Billee. We must be very circumspect, if I take it on. It will be difficult otherwise . . . you see that?"

"Yes—but I hate it all the same. I think it's the rottenest bit of luck I ever heard of. So do Sails, Chips and bo'sun."

"Thanks, dear old boy," Grey smiled. "I didn't suppose I was quite such a favourite except with you naturally. There. That's done with. Cut along and be good. Where was it you said you were going?"

"To clear up decks and pump her out, Harold."

"Right. Report to the officer of the watch."

After that he was alone again, the cabin quiet, the Joss-pidgin motif more than ever present. "Hairy Johnny," he mused, "yes—he is the man. Curious how things come about!" But the "row" of which he had spoken, remained unsolved. A hint, evolved he knew not how—was present; simmering in his mind. With some it would have vanished; but Grey had his mother's temperament, tempered it is true by the stronger characteristics of his father—while Raffles was the little mother, musically, mystically part of her.

The sun had set and a crimsoned twilight shone obliquely across Grey's bunk. It fell upon a mirror set within it, and on the crayon drawing of a tumble-haired girl, alive with laughter and sunshine, sitting astride her pony—a picture of a child just reaching her teens. At the opposite end of the bunk were a pair of crossed swords and the portrait of a Captain in the East India Company's service. Grey's father, Raffles's father; and the picture that faced him was that of his wife when first he knew her.

The girl was older now, often sunk in thought, alone a great deal, her beautiful eyes wistful, especially when they fell on Raffles; trusting, full of faith when they fell on Harold.

Ten years lay between the brothers, yet it was easy to read what tie bound them; easy, too, to understand the relationship between that laughing girl and Harold her first-born. But for those who had come under the spell of her voice it was easier—Mums at the piano accompanying her own songs in her own way, Harold leaning forward wrapt, Raffles at her elbow.

In his face especially was the clue to their kinship;

in his eyes some quality, held in check by his training, which proclaimed him one of those who are endowed with vision . . . perhaps the power to read what thought has written in psychic characters on air.

The monsoon blared across East Lama Channel, sending eddies which touched the crimson bay and kept *Kow-Loon* restless at her anchors. Far off was the Praya and the misty, moving lights upon it. Languorous the hour, full of enchantment. At the pumps men sang and a whisper of it entered Grey's cabin. They were dismal to-night, the shanty minor, lugubrious—

“O ! they say as how there's a new old man,
Leave her, Johnny, leave her ;
O'll stand at 'is desk an' give it a bang,
Oh ! it's time for us to leave her.

An' he'll talk of Joss, as no sailors do,
Leave her, Johnny, leave her ;
An' try to make out as he ain't a Jew,
So it's time for us to leave her.”

“Extraordinary how these fellows manage to get the rhymes !” Grey mused and straightway forgot the matter. How long the singing continued he did not inquire. It was all mixed in some way with the snatches of music to which he had been listening. He sat there very hot and uncomfortable, puzzled, facing the bunk with its pictures, mirror and cross-swords. Sometimes his lips moved, yet no sound came. Maybe he dozed.

Outside the port was a windsail trained cunningly to scoop air. The sea beyond was shimmering as it

does when a stillness reigns, pushing in what Grey called "little squimmy touches" that swam on the mirror and on the picture which hung beneath it. The mirror became blurred. Grey thought he reached forward to clear it; but in his mind he knew full well he had not moved.

Then music reached him plainly; some kind of band playing not far off—indeed it seemed to come from the cuddy.

Grey refused that. It could not be.

Men conversant with ship life unanimously would have jeered at the notion, yet the Chief remained quiescent. He listened further, neither refusing nor opposing: memory registering the fact that he had heard it before; that he knew the intervals, the rhythm—every note of it, and would never forget who gave him the knowledge.

He sat there pliant, silent, his face alight, saying in his mind, "Only a hand as light and strong as yours could play it so."

He was no longer puzzling over troublesome details. He was no longer alert. Indeed he seemed uneasy. His breath came fast yet he did not stir. His eyes were on the picture, his mother's face superimposed upon it . . . beautiful . . .

All those "squimmy lines" and curves which circled endlessly entranced him. The mirror, more dark now, was definitely blurred. And the music rolled on—dirge-like, the same melody as on that night when poor Downes died at the entrance to Carimata Strait. . . . He glanced about. Surely it was Raffles who played—Raffles who was on the poop, whose footsteps he heard. Wrong! It was his

mother's song: Schubert's *Erl-King*. He shivered, listening to the opening line—" *Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?* " . . .

He told himself it was impossible, yet stirred imagining catastrophe. He searched the cabin wide-eyed, still. Nothing to account for it . . . Nothing. Only the picture which did not fade.

Then, like a band on the march, the music slowly ceased; the galloping motif, the voice—all faded, and there crept upon his lulled senses the tap of drums, tom-toms and the wailing harmonies of a Malay singer. Instantly the tension lapsed. Grey leaned forward acknowledging it. It *was* Raffles who played . . . Raffles who was on watch up there on the poop . . . Raffles who had stolen a march upon his brother and now chuckled musically with the harmonies of the bazaars! Fascinating!

There was nothing sacred here, nothing to put Grey in touch with the old days when he lay in bed, listening to his mother's voice and passed into sleep entranced. It was Eastern, barbaric, alluring. It called him to, and he rose, passing into the alleyway. It was quite dark there and he wondered why the steward had not lighted up, yet failed to comment on his lapse. With hands outstretched he crept on. The farther he went the more clearly the music thrummed, drummed, wailed. Raffles! Of course! Stupid to make a sailor of a boy who could play like that! Again, the thought touched him. He entered the cuddy. No one in it. No lights. From the cabin beyond came the roll of drums . . . drums . . . arpeggios which tinkled. . . .

He opened the door and looked in.

The semi-darkness of a cabin lighted by eight ports facing the afterglow confronted him. No one in it. No Raffles—only the music changing magically from minor to major, drums fading, hoofs galloping afar off, and the voice singing back in the old rhythm—“*Du leiber kind, komme, geh mit mir!*”

While Grey, with hands lifted, advanced crying out: “Don’t! Don’t! I can’t bear it . . . Mother—is it you?”

He stood there fumbling with a semi-darkness that seemed opaque, striving to pierce it, seeing only the dim blood-tinge of the great square ports, and beyond, a glimpse of the Praya, the rickshaws and carriages rolling far off, pricked with lights.

Nothing else there. Nor any voice to answer his cry. Darkness. Emptiness. The piano open but no one before it.

The Chief stood like one graven in marble, his lips moving, his eyes wide and staring. He stood with icy fingers touching his spine, his hair stirring, in a room which held no one; where nothing moved, no light came, no shrouded figures loomed. “The Little Mother!” on his lips, breathed, like a prayer. . . .

And she came to greet him from the shadows flung by the rudder-trunk; came with arms held wide, smiling; tears in her eyes, the Chinese shawl he had given her when last at home about her neck.

“Not afraid, Harold?” she asked, as it seemed she surely would, and he replying smiled, “Of you, dear? Why?”

Then it appears he told her all that troubled him, how he had been writing to her when the music called

him . . . and how in a few days they would be sailing for home . . .

At this she interrupted with a gesture and words that puzzled him in spite of his belief that these things were impossible ; that the future is hid, a sealed book which no one can read. Her words fell to the rhythm of a song. "Through Carimata Strait again, dear Harold, and I fear it. I cannot forget until God lifts the veil. . . . And Billee . . . our little Billee draws near . . . Dust ! Dust ! Dust ! ' *In seinen Armen das Kind war tot . . . !* ' "

"No ! No !" he pleaded, drawing close, seeking to capture her hands. "It could not be !"

Like a shadow which fades when the sun passes behind a cloud, so she faded from before him. A sheen, a curtain slowly falling came between them, and she was gone. The cabin still, the great square ports unveiled—no hands outstretched ; no shawl, no voice . . . all quiet and normal, as is the way with ships lying in Hong-Kong Bay.

A sound trickled bell-like past the man's ears. "Dust ! Dust ! Dust !" then silence.

He discovered this when at length he opened his eyes and saw his brother leaning over, touching him. He thought he had found, too, the whole meaning and explanation of his experience. He said, "Then you were here after all !"

Raffles shook that off. "I came in ten minutes ago and found you here. I was just going to call the Second. What's wrong, Harold ? Feel any better ?"

Which showed him the fallacy of which he had been guilty, closed his lips and sent his gaze in search about

the cabin. Music gone. Song gone . . . everything staid, puzzling, singularly commonplace.

Just the old dim scene of their sing-songs when Downes was there ; transoms, eight blood-red ports, an open piano, the creak and groan of a rudder playing on its gimbals . . . the rush and gurgle of seas eddying far down the trunk.

Again he looked at his brother and said jerkily :

"I shall come home with you . . . it wouldn't be fair to leave you with that clodhopper. . . ."

"No, no—we'll both leave her. You can get the Mathieson billet . . . and I'll run."

"Running away from a ship out here is death, Billee. It can't be done. You don't understand—anyhow, I am going home in her, and I'm taking you with me. . . ."

Now when Raffles came down from the poop to report eight bells, he found his brother lying flat on the deck, so drowsy he could not arouse him. He sat down and tried chafing—uncertain how to act.

But the most singular part of the story lies in the fact that when the two met, Raffles was creeping along on tiptoe to discover where the music came from . . . and had forgotten all about eight bells.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMING OF DUST

A JUNK, brilliant with hieroglyphics and flowing colours, passed *Kow-Loon* as she lay with loosened canvas weighing anchor.

The crew of the junk fired crackers to propitiate the devils which waited to harm them while crossing to the shrine which lay beyond. Aft in the junk's stern was a small temple sacred to the Joss who was her lord. On a low platform fronting him were fruit and rice, lest he should require sustenance on the way. Joss-sticks burning within the temple trailed scent upon the wind.

The crew of *Kow-Loon*, without temple or joss-sticks, sniffed it as she passed, singing as the *Kwei-tsze** sang always :

“ We’re homeward bound to London Town,
Good-bye, fare you well ; good-bye, fare you well !
To kiss the gells an’ buy a gown,
 Hurrah ! my boys, we’re homeward bound !
An’ smash the bloke that came an’ thought,
 Good-bye, fare you well ; good-bye, fare you well !
While Jack’s at sea she could be bought :
 Hurrah ! my boys, we’re homeward bound !

To the click of windlass pawls they sang it while Williams marched across and across the poop beside the escutcheon carven with the mystic Buddhist prayer, “ *Om ! Mani padme, hum,* ” which speaks of the “ Jewel of the Lotus,” who is God ; a prayer which every Tibetan believes is a panacea for all evil, a compendium of all knowledge, a treasury of all wisdom, a summary of all religion.

‘ The devil’s children.

And on the fo'c'sle head of the *fank-wei** ship, the *Kwei-tsze* sang the song of the homeward bound, tossing into a vat of words the love of women, the singularities of a Joss-pidgin who commanded them, and now strode about, uncomfortably aware of his environment.

With a vast fluttering of canvas *Kow-Loon* presently stole away from her anchorage, the song dead, sails spread, the scent of joss-sticks already vanished. Stole away while men sang heroically, stamping to a marching chorus as the sails climbed up and were sheeted home. Came to a place midway between Green Island and Kau-i-chau, where she went about and presently entered East Lama Channel. Set there on a bowline by *Kwei-tsze* who laughed and sang, while thoughtful men burned joss-sticks and set food before their small wooden god lest he should faint by the way.

Night fell on *Kow-Loon* when she was far from East Lama Channel, stretching across a brisk monsoon towards Luzon of the Philippines. Under all sail she came to greet the sunset squall, dusk already upon her with clouds and rain.

Williams stood in the lee of a screen spread in the mizzen rigging, sole arbiter of the ship and her crew. He stood there somewhat bunched, his head twisted, his long arms thrust deep in his oilskin pockets. He was moody and nervous. Sometimes he walked a short distance as though he meditated giving an order; came back not having given it. The officers were busy with the routine work of ships newly come from a harbour. There was nothing to harass a calm com-

* Foreign.

mander, yet Williams already had a quarrel with the man at the wheel when Grey reached the poop. To leeward were a couple of junks taking a long leg across the monsoon; astern the lights of a steamer which presently would head into the teeth of it.

"Keep your luff!" Williams growled, standing on the weather quarter in the bunched attitude which at once proclaimed his kinship with the ape.

"Luff it is, sir."

The canvas heavy with rain gave a machine-gun rattle as *Kow-Loon* obeyed her helm, and Williams looked over, flinging venom.

"I said 'Keep your luff'—damn your eyes, not bring her round. Up with your hel-lum—up... D'ye hear?"

"Aye, aye, sir. Meet her it is!"

"Meet her, Hell——" He came near vibrant with rage and said, "If I have to speak again I'll have you disrated . . . understand?"

He marched away, came to the break of the poop; turned and came back. Grey meanwhile climbed the ladder and went to stand near the binnacle, gathering in strands. "Don't get her wild," he said. "She steers as usual, doesn't she?"

"Steers like a boat, sir—if he'd only let me alone," the man growled. "He's at it every time she heels a bit more."

"Phut! I know. Don't get flustered."

The skipper walked up the deck, glanced at the compass and said, "Take a pull on the lee braces fore an' aft. She's not half sharpened up. She's got to do better than this if I slack off the lee backstays."

Grey acknowledged the order and used his whistle. Thereafter came the song of men intent on springing

the yards, interspersed with gruff "belays" and the scream of the bosun's pipe.

Grey turned aft when the final order had been given to see the result. Williams stood near the helmsman, "sayin' his prayers one minute, an' lettin' go somethin' ter'ble the next," as the man explained when Grey logged him. This occurred after he had been relieved. An equally incompetent watch-mate now stood in his place while the skipper walked up and down showing the versatility of one known in Hong-Kong as a Joss-pidgin.

Grey logged two men of his watch before four bells—then he saw Williams and gave his opinions. He said at first he was at a loss to understand why men who had been in the ship for over two years without complaint should suddenly appear incompetent. Williams said, "It matters very little whether you are at a loss or not, the men are farmers. I've seen men triced up by the thumbs for less on the West Coast, and by the holy poker if it goes on here you will see it, too, Mister Mate. Mark my words if you don't. . . ."

He made this so offensive, when presently a squall drenched them in the blackness, that Grey said, "No man will be triced up while I am Chief, Captain Williams, so you may as well understand it at once."

"What . . . what you mean?"

"Just this. You may do it after you have put me under arrest, Captain, but not before."

Williams' hand went up to his beard. He seemed about to tear it, to splutter perhaps, yet did nothing. Said nothing. Commenced presently to walk. Continued thus for an hour, then halted near the companion, one foot on the top stair and said: "You fail

of your purpose, Chief. And you judge as the unjust judge. I allow no *bheesty* work on my ship. What you allowed when you were Captain is between your God and yourself, what I allow is between the God of all ages and His servant. . . . Call me if there is any change and in any case at end of watch."

He went below. His door slammed. At eight bells, when Grey spoke into the voice-pipe making his report, Williams said the personal touch was necessary in these matters. Would the Chief come down?

Grey found him in an arm-chair poring over a large book. As he crossed to sit he discovered it was the Bible. He noticed, too, that beyond inviting him to take a chair the skipper had not moved nor lifted his eyes. When he did, Grey was quietened by what he saw.

"My occupation," Williams proclaimed, "may seem strange to you; but it is my custom. When affairs are more than usually troublesome, I take them and lay them before the Lord. If I have lost my temper as sometimes occurs, I explain the cause, and the Lord comforts me. If I have been compelled to adopt strong measures to enforce discipline, I put the case in God's hands and ask His blessing . . . for it is conceivable that there are occasions—especially at sea—when it is necessary to act with severity; even to punish a fellow-creature who in other conditions might not have deserved it . . . You see that?"

Grey, listening, surprised, was aware of something unusual in the skipper's demeanour. He looked strange, yet his argument was logical, the singular pallor of his face set in a forest of hair had a certain pathos that Grey did not understand. He thought it wise to

acquiesce and said that undoubtedly conditions were a palliating factor in such cases—wisely leaving the ball in play.

“True, Chief,” Williams ejaculated. “Absolutely.” He closed the Bible sharply, placed it beside him and added: “How’s the weather? More wind, less wind, rain, fair—in point of fact, What?”

And Grey answered seriatim: “Rather less than more wind, Captain, rather more than less rain. The monsoon seems firmly set.”

“Squally still?”

“As usual, sir. Nothing to write home about.”

“No—I agree. Well, I won’t keep you, Chief. No doubt the watch is in good hands. . . . I shall go on deck myself very shortly. . . .”

As he again took the Bible on his knees Grey made his escape. He saw Elgar who was on duty, told him something of the skipper’s attitude and went below. It was one bell before he lay down; yet he did not sleep. It occurred to him as he listened to the lashing rain, and the ripple of wet sails high and taut in the night, that at all events one person held a candle to the devil on *Kow-Loon* even as on the junk. But here it burned without incense.

Three days later, Grey again in charge, the skipper showed another facet. Since that first ebullition he had been quiet, but now came a moodiness which puzzled the Chief.

At sunset the sky, which was partially clouded, had flamed so amazingly that men accustomed as sailors are to the glorious pageant of sunrise and sunset, lined the rail although it was the tea hour. They appeared

loth to lose sight of it. Elgar came out, Cobham, all the Afterguard. The world seemed ablaze and the smoke of it came up with the monsoon in spirals of tinged flame from beneath the horizon. The rain had ceased long since ; the wind seemed about to follow suit.

Then, broad on the weather beam as the last streamer flickered out, high amidst the clouds came a red glow, dimmed to duskiness, which flashed lazily once and went out. Soundless it grew and died. The skipper, who had been leaning against the rail aft, caught sight of it and called out : " See that ? "

Grey had seen it and said so. It had puzzled him, for the light was not of the quality that shines from a meteor. It had set him thinking, but the skipper it had alarmed. He crossed over and joined the Chief, the corners of his mouth twitching, the jerk evident which accompanied the twitch.

" Going to set in squally ! " he said unevenly, combing with erect fingers at his beard. " Thunder probably—better get the light sails off her, Mr Grey."

The Chief had his doubts ; but made no comment ; gave the necessary orders and while the watch was rolling them up, again the sky glowed rosily—high up where it was dark and cloudy. This time Williams exclaimed as before, adding the information : " Lightning ! Dirt coming, sure."

Grey refused that. He said : " I never saw lightning like it, sir. It covered the whole dome."

" Then what was it ? "

" I can't say definitely."

" Well—what do you suppose ? "

" As a matter of fact, sir, it struck me as volcanic."

"Rubbish. . . ."

"Of course, I don't pretend to know, but . . ."

"No occasion to explain. I think you are wrong. I hold it was lightning. There's something vicious about . . . When hands come down from aloft get the t'gallant-s'ls clewed up and made fast. We shall be ready then, whatever it was."

"As you will, sir," Grey answered.

Williams hurried excitedly up and down before him. "You wouldn't do that—eh? That what you mean? Takes a man to shorten down on a night like this—doesn't it? A man of judgment, eh?"

Grey had no quarrel with this. He stood his ground saying: "You asked my opinion, Captain, and I gave it. If you didn't expect an answer why did you ask?"

The skipper stood still, his jaw working. "You talked of 'volcanic' just now—suggesting eruptions. What do you know of eruptions . . . ever come nigh hand one?"

"Yes, sir. Close enough to be unpleasant if it interests you. It's a common experience in the East."

"No doubt. Thank God I know very little of the East, never want to see it again. A sink of beastiality, infidelity and idolatry, that's what the East is. Not one God but many—some of 'em with a dozen heads and filthy attitudes—worse if you care to think of the world as it was when God made it. . . . Small wonder there are earthquakes and eruptions. It will end some day as Sodom and Gomorrah did—sure as there's a God above us. . . ."

"Of course," said Grey, "if there were no vents, there would very soon be no world."

"What! What! No vents?" Williams stamped out, his eyes again blazing. "What do you mean with your vents?"

"Volcanoes, sir . . ."

"Volcanoes be damned . . ." He stuttered and Grey put in:

"If boilers were fired without safety-valves they would explode, sir, would they not?"

With his eyes sidelong upon his companion Williams admitted this would follow.

"And so would the earth, sir, in my opinion, if it were not fitted with safety-valves which we call volcanoes. . . ."

"Ba! Ba! Black sheep," Williams mocked. "All these are the beginnings of Sorrows." In six days the Lord made Heaven and Earth and all that therein is, *and* rested on the seventh day, *and* hallowed it. Nothing about safety-valves there, is there? Volcanoes be damned! Who made you a judge of volcanoes and eruptions? Instinct? Brush it away! You fancy you're Captain still. You're not. I'm Captain and I won't be argued with and defied. I'll strip the ship to a damned gantlin* if I want—see?"

"Just as you choose, of course," Grey answered, as soon as he had recovered from his surprise and watching as the skipper drew near with lifted hands. Then sharply he uttered: "That's close enough!" praying the thing might be decided once for all. But Williams was not the man to attack one stronger. With a gust of words he wriggled and "Pished" his way out—while Grey caught a whiff of the "courage" he had absorbed.

* Equivalent to only one rope aloft. Bare.

Nothing happened. The skipper resumed his walk, the Chief gave orders which so reduced sail that *Kow-Loon* seemed prepared to face the typhoon of which they had spoken. At midnight when Elgar came on deck there was not sufficient wind to blow a mosquito to leeward.

In the village where he was brought up, as he phrased it and indicating Wales by this flight, Williams would have been admitted as a crank of the first magnitude; but in command of a ship whose antecedents went back to the days of John Company he was a white elephant or white-livered—which you choose. His sea experience had been gained in country-wallahs and the west coast of South America; his boyhood certainly in the former, though it is conceivable he would have denied it. For as days went on it became apparent that he fretted in his new command.

Before they had been a week at sea the men discovered from the texts so constantly on his lips and his frequent allusions to the Last Day, Pillars of Salt and other metaphorical tintinnabula, that they were used to cloak his fear, the fear of God, which seemed alive to threaten him alone. Grey, on the other hand, speedily decided that it was not the fear of God that troubled him, but of something intangible, vague; perhaps of the sea which had wrung him and left him doddering; perhaps of some vision. He could not determine which.

How deep this trouble had gone, or what caused it, it was difficult to decide. It might come out; but having experienced his tantrums the men were

unanimous which of the two devils they preferred. Grey! they cried at each new instance. Grey! Always Grey.

Music was taboo, so the man at the wheel no longer had the solace. The dog-watch was mirthless—no concertina, no piano, no band or chorus on the fo’c’slehead on calm nights. Raffles pined. He was always in trouble, and his brother, walking the poop one mid-watch, said definitely there must be no more sing-songs, no more shanties, for the skipper called them ribald. “The piano may come on deck,” he added as a final blow, “but if it does you’ll have to play hymn tunes while the Johns (sailors) try their hands at the words. It’s going to be deadly, dear boy, and you’d best pretend you like it. . . .”

“Why?” Raffles questioned.

“Because if you don’t he’ll have his knife into you as well as me—I’m fey, you remember—fey!” he laughed.

When the old man flung that dart at his Chief, it is just possible he supposed that instead of prophesying Grey’s doom, he cast a slur on his sanity. It was the sort of thing ignorance would prompt. Whether he understood the phrase is beside the mark. His sombre and austere habitude forbade smiles and laughter was levity. He was surly, a curious mixture, without traditions or any faith in them. Also he was Captain by grace of his countrymen in a service lineally descended from the East India Company. He was, too, as he termed it, religious. In other words *le bon Dieu* of our friends was a God of Wrath and *la grace de Dieu* existed solely as an antidote to lasting experiments in slow combustion.

CHAPTER V

WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

TWO days later this ill-assorted pair were walking the poop after taking morning sights, Grey busy with analysis, the skipper brooding.

The flashes had continued—always in the same quarter. Once Grey caught a faint flare which darted to the zenith and got, roughly, a bearing. Projected on the chart it pointed to the Straits of Sunda, or the mountains of East Sumatra. With the skipper he had a discussion; futile to the last degree. At all events no gale had troubled them; indeed the monsoon steadily failed, and sail had been made without reference to the dangerous topic. And now they walked.

At length Williams paused by the companion and said he wished to read prayers daily at eight bells—or, in other words, before the watch that had been eight hours on deck went to breakfast. Grey, scenting trouble and feeling reckless, said it was an innovation the men would resent. As the argument broadened he rather implied he would be on the side of the mutineers. Then again the skipper twitted him with being fey—which was mild after last night's experience.

Now the helmsman heard what was said and on his relief went hot foot to report what threatened them all. "Prayers, me sons—prayers while the cawfee gets cowl'd an' the cracker hash goes shlimmy. . . . Half an hour out of our watch below—an' us eight hours out the night, if the Chief can't stop it."

"Did he try?" one asked.

"Begorra—he did—an' the skipper thurns on him

an' sez—sez he: 'It's fey yez are, fey.' I'm at the wheel an' heard."

The thing seemed incredible. A Dalesman faced the watch, sarcasm on his tongue: "T'skipper's fey, not the Chief," he announced. "Sitha the Chief's a man, an' if he did come under the law when he buried Downes, he's no in the running wi' t' Chink—a Chink wha's los' his tail an' all. Might be luckier wi' a Manx cat in t' galley, than yon when aa's said."

The fo'c'sle agreed, clamorously shouting their views.

This goes to show that in the men's opinion prayers would not operate as an antidote to ill-luck, that the ship's luck was arraigned, and that some person, possibly the Chink, or persons on board, were in bad odour with the god whose word at sea is law.

The moment for such a discussion was ripe, for the *Kow-Loon* was well on her way to Sunda and her luck had been of the worst. All down China Sea the monsoon had played Fanny-Nanny with them. They no sooner tacked than the wind headed them and they had to tack again. If they took in sail it fell calm, if they made sail it became necessary to call all hands to shorten down. That strange coloration of the sky, too, puzzled them. No one "had seen the like." "She doesn't get a chance," was the men's verdict, "an' if she doesn't, who's to blame?"

Not the ship you perceive. Not the season. No outside circumstance; but some person who happened to be on board, who for divers reasons were better overboard.

Decidedly it was not the ship, for she was of teak, her lineage in every line, splendid as on the day when

she came round to join the fleet of the Honourable John Company and carry its flag. Sailors know a ship when they see one, and here was an East Indiaman, pierced as was the lordly fashion of her prime for thirty guns, and run by men who had handled her for two years. In their opinion spooks, the ghosts of dead and gone crews, or the singular appearance of a Chink who was tail-less were the cause. In any case the men who worked her down China Sea in August 1883 swore by her as well as at her. She was a witch on a bowline. You could go about her decks dry-foot in a gale, and when she was running you might bell the cat. They swore it.

Singularly, no one suggested the new skipper.

So the days passed. And now on the poop, a fortnight on their way towards Sunda, were the officers busily engaged "chasing the sun" which hung witch-like at the zenith. Williams had laid aside the umbrella which usually screened him when he sat, and was covered by a solar topee of generous build. He tapered from head to feet—a man grim, bent, his eyes sunken. At the moment they were in shadow, yet seemed strangely sombre. A moment since they exhibited a restlessness which the brim of his topee scarcely concealed; and as Grey brought his sextant down to read the arc he looked across and asked with the usual asperity: "Well, what do you make it?"

"Noon, sir," said the Chief.

"True. Five minutes since," which was untrue. "Make it."

Quite in the old mode in spite of jaundiced intonation. The god who presided over the destiny of *Kow-*

Loon, had he been present, doubtless would have made himself vocal. Then, at a signal from Grey, Raffles, who stood near the officers, slipped across, struck the bell and made off swiftly to get his lime-juice.

"That boy," said the skipper, watching him, "must be taught manners. If you don't see to it, I shall."

Grey looked at him squarely, summing him, and he went down wrathful to work her up.*

Beyond and around them was the Carimata Strait shimmering in the pitiless glare of a nearly vertical sun. In sinister patches the sea steamed as though fog touched its glassy surface; but the air was too heated for fogs; too merciless, too white, and the glare which lay upon it was but the reflection of the glare which came from the white shield swimming high in a white-hot sky, spraying white heat upon the Strait.

Far off a group of sun-laden islets trembled, clad with palms and mangoes to each golden beach. On the port bow two native traders with great winged sails trimmed with flags like the teeth of a sawfish clung tenderly to the picture sketched upon the sea which carried them. Occasionally came the wavering song of one who sat upon the nearer—piercing, insistent, like the cry of a bird in a snare.

When the monsoon fails thus in Carimata Strait, and other singular phenomena are afoot, whistling as a sop to the devil of other seas, is a foolishness which few seamen are likely to commit. Men look for the monsoon here as they look for the rains in India and the farther East. They know that when the sun is astride the deserts of Gobi he will produce the essential

* To fix the ship's position.

vacuum which the sou'-west wind will very effectually fill. But to-day it brought dust, a pungent, impalpable dust together with this calm which had been threatening ever since the *Kow-Loon* weathered Anamba Islands and was in a position to stretch away for the Strait with a free wind.

It brought also those singular patches of steam which left slime on the surface and were not steam. It brought a strange restlessness of sea and land birds : great flights which had passed away towards China Sea, calling to each other as they flew—screaming. It brought anxiety to the officers and a puckered brow to that Chink who was tail-less. To Williams it brought fear.

At noon three factors outpaced all others. At sunset the ship's sails hung like shutters drawn upon the chrome and bronzed-crimson of a sky which in its higher reaches trailed away into pea-green and green-blue. Cloudless, flecked with copper were the heavens. The ship stood out against them, flame touching the rails, wheel, binnacle and skylights—agleam upon a purple sea.

The islands no longer trembled in a white haze ; the traders appeared nearer, their notched sails stamped hard upon the chrome ; the voice no longer wailed. . . . And with dusk came the boom of drums.

The junks and shipping, lying across the bay from Hong-Kong one evening a fortnight sunk in time, were not more beautiful in their environment than were these traders of the islands and this one tall ship, all halted in a group not far from Flying Fish Reef when sunset fell on the pulse of day.

Hot still at ten o'clock. Hot in spite of the velvet dusk, the stars blinking cool messages from the farther heavens. Hot because of the windless leagues and arid lands which lay around, hot because of the ship's abandonment by the one power able to move her, hot on deck, hotter below. The men lying on mats and blankets under the stars rolled wet heads on their pillows, restless as those islanders afar off, whose drums alone made sound. Drums which talk, which pray, which send messages ; which cried out now, one island to another : " What of the night ? What of those mutterings that reach us even here as once before ? Does the dragon arise as of old ? "

Night was gone ; to-morrow passing flame-lit to rest in the still silence of a windless sky. Nothing moved. Someone yawned and the sound ran up the vault. The traders stood like twin shadows flung upon a sea of gold. The voice that had chanted last night took up its burden once more as evening fell. There were melons, pumalow, oranges, bananas—fruit and merchandise on the traders. Maybe the voice thanked the Master of man's destiny this was so—otherwise conceivably the traders would starve.

The amethyst waters of the Strait were alive to the pressure of this ship. They were becoming accustomed to her presence. Like the islands and the traders she came from somewhere and stayed ; therefore they mirrored her lines, her ports and all her gem-like points, as in a glass. They took in her rigging, the flicking gossamers which were her sails, and presently added the colour of two lights, red, green, which she displayed one on either bow—but of the dust which was thick

upon her, and the little pools of slime which lay around, the sea took no heed.

Meanwhile the Captain became more silent, more morose, more constant in his march up and down the deck. He seemed to be searching his mind for a solution of some problem, perhaps of several, and apt in biblical quotations descriptive of his state. Grey maintained such silence as he could and watched him. You could never tell where he would spring or on whom.

It was the third day of the calm. The drums calling from village to village and island to island irritated one whose nerves were on edge. At it again! was his thought. There's no sense in it. Nor could he see an end to it. Meanwhile that Chief of his had it fixed off. Volcanic! Dust was volcanic. Flares in the sky were volcanic. Every damn thing was volcanic except the wind, and the wind was gone a-maying like as not—if they mayed in this ungodly hole. . . . Meanwhile there was that Chief of his poking around the bulwarks looking for dust. Dust! . . . He pished at the thing, much as he wished to solve it.

That Chief!

He stood still, his eyes singularly sad, his square shoulders and rather long arms drooping. He could not have said why he searched, or for what. Far off it was. Sunk in time. Hallowed by memory? Scarcely. An irritant? Perhaps. He looked up and saw Grey crossing the poop and heard him say: "Unless I'm a mile out, sir, there's trouble somewhere. I was in touch with it in *Assaye*."

"Rubbish!"

That was the Captain's opinion; obviously, too,

his belief. Yet in spite of that comment he seemed more impressed by Grey than had been the case.

It was like throwing oil on flames, to speak of volcanoes or eruptions to a man who contended that finality had been reached in the six days of Creation. He walked the deck from time to time giving his reasons, watching Grey much more intently than he was aware. He halted now, and leaning slightly to emphasize his words, his tapering silhouette dark against the afterglow, said: "In Java Sea we should consider the monsoon—not dust."

Having thus shut the door on discussion, he entered the companion, slammed back the scuttle and went down. Reaching his cabin, behind a banged door he sat, elbows on the small table beside him, his jaw held between cupped hands, staring at the bulkhead. There was no picture on it. Nothing—yet he was engrossed.

He rose presently, opened a drawer and filled a glass—tossed it off and sat as before. . . .

Again he rose and walked unsteadily, sat, staring at the bulkhead; sat, his chin in cupped hands, his beard thrust out, black, greying at the temples. A long while he remained thus. Upon the bulkhead was no picture—nothing. He started erect, his eyes on the cabin door, crossed, opened swiftly and looked out. Nothing. He closed the door and came back mumbling: "Must act—now. Must . . . No peace . . . For two pins I would . . . Ah! No—nothing."

And suddenly he crossed to the voice-tube; whistled into it, spoke: "Tell the Chief Officer I wish to see him."

All very correct and proper.

When Grey entered Williams was sitting on his settee, his Bible open on his lap. He looked up, indicating a chair opposite. "Everything the same as when I left the deck?" he asked.

"Precisely, sir."

"I wish to take your opinion on this, the cxxxix Psalm."

He bent low over the book, reading :

"O Lord thou hast searched me and known me.

"Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off.

"Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

"For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.

"Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain to it.

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence. If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there ; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

"If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea ; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

He ceased reading and sat looking at Grey. "You appreciate that? 'If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there' . . . God Almighty is there. He is there to save me. Enemy ; friend ; saint ; sinner—He is there to save each. You believe that?"

"It is in God's Word," Grey said; awed, perhaps a little amazed. "We must believe it."

"Must! No further than that, Chief?" He closed the book. Suddenly the pallor of his face increased; he appeared older, weary. He stole a glance at his companion and swiftly looked away.

"You remind me strangely of someone I knew—years ago. A memory, perhaps an illusion . . . but the same self-sufficiency, the same theories of life, death and the Judgment. God! Singular!"

"I don't quite see what you are driving at," Grey said, watching him; wondering if he would spring, wondering if this were madness. . . .

"I want to know where I have seen you before," came back brusque—in a new tone.

"As to that," Grey said at random, "you were in the *Sorisha*—probably that accounts for it."

"In the *Sorisha*—who said so?"

"The Agents."

"And you were in her too—you knew her?"

"Years ago, yes . . . when I was a boy."

"When?"

The word fell like a whisper; he wetted his lips with his tongue.

"My father was Captain. My mother and brother were there also, with me."

"Your father—what was his name?"

"Grey."

"True. True—stupid! . . . Everything so jumbled . . . and he was *your* father?"

"Yes—but they murdered him during the only voyage we were in her——"

"Murdered! Are you sure . . . what?"

"Undoubtedly. The surgeon said he was strangled."

"By whom? . . . strangled!"

"I don't know. I wish to heaven I did!"

"God! God! God! . . . strangled—in the ship . . . at sea?"

"In Carimata Strait, very near where we are now," Grey said, "when we were dismasted in the typhoon."

"And he was strangled then? God! God! Am I to believe in Thy . . ." he paused, reshaped the phrase: "Am I to believe you are speaking the—the truth?"

"Why in the world should I lie?" Grey asked, with a flick of passion. "Do you suppose I am likely to joke on such a subject?"

"No. No—yet strange things happen at sea. Terrible things . . . tell me everything—everything you know? When was it?"

"In 1870."

"Ah-h!"

He breathed slowly. He seemed beside himself with emotion, surprise, fear. Grey could make nothing of it—only that he seemed more blanched, cadaverous—with no blood in him.

"So the Agents told you I was in the *Sorisha*. True. I was." He rose, the Bible forgotten, the eye of God forgotten, His understanding forgotten, His presence even in Hell that He might save sinners—all tossed to the winds. "Yes, I was in *Sorisha*, but not in 1870. Not in any typhoon, not in Carimata Strait . . . nowhere near the damned place, and don't care if I never see it again." He snapped his fingers, walked up and down once or twice, then halted and said: "A most wonderful Psalm. I read it nearly every night."

It helps me with my burden. I wish you could have gone farther than 'Must,' Chief. Now I am going to pray."

Grey returned to the poop and walked awhile considering this interview. Was the man sane? Could any man who was sane act and talk as he did? It puzzled Grey for an hour. The vision of an ape to which he was harnessed troubled him, then he pushed it from him and fell back on the dust which was a conundrum of another kind. He looked over the side and saw the pools of slime. He would have liked to analyse that, but it was too elusive, so he tackled the dust. Lord! what a mix-up, in Carimata Strait, too, where the dear old man had died, and Downes had followed suit. And that Psalm! A sort of dirge over our dead! Again he pushed it away, pulled out his knife and scraped together a little heap from the rail. This he placed on a sheet of paper and carried into the companion where a lamp burned.

Holding the paper horizontally he flicked it sharply from beneath. He seemed engrossed by the result. It was as though he imagined the stuff would remain in suspense, but it fell, slowly. Then he gathered another small heap and tried the same experiment under the stars . . . with the same result. The dust fell within a very small circle, practically plumb. He sniffed it. The same smell. It made him sneeze.

The thing puzzled Grey mainly because of the old man's attitude. You don't expect, he argued, to find *land* dust on a ship's deck when she is at sea. In the Red Sea you may find it; in narrow waters which border on deserts you may find it—if there is a breeze. Dust

must be carried by the wind if you are to find it in mid-ocean. Now this dust was carried without wind—yet from a height of two or three feet it fell nearly plumb.

Grey held up his hand as he walked—not a breath stirred. He stood looking out; Borneo lay to port, Sumatra to starboard. The distance between these two varies from 270 to perhaps 80 or 90 miles. What then was this dust? He could not say, nor had his experience “down under” provided a clue.

To-night, moreover, he was oppressed. He was in touch again with the singular influence which troubled him. Someone calling him, warning him, praying. True, they were in Carimata Strait where so much trouble had befallen them; Carimata which he hoped never to see again. He felt there was some connection between these events; but because he was sane and knew nothing of psychic force; because he was a born sceptic to all talk of predestination, he pushed the notion from him with the phrase: “Oh! well, there must be a lot we shall never understand.”

The babble of a crew who prosed of the luck or ill-luck brought by a Chink who was tail-less, or a Manx cat, as being on the same plane with Destiny, left him cold. “Destiny,” he was accustomed to announce when arguing with someone who counted, “is just what you make of your life,” without knowing he came near an aphorism of Voltaire.* Yet the dust troubled him. Did it not recall his mother’s cry, her strange presence. . . .

Perhaps he was specially alert to-night because the men when clearing up the decks at sunset found larger accumulations than before. Not only was it on all

* Fate is temperament.

smooth surfaces, but in the blocks, amidst the ship's running gear and greasily thick in coils of rope laid clear for emergency.

These had to be slammed on the deck and recoiled. So fine and impalpable was it, it rose and hung in the air; stung the men's nostrils—made them sneeze or want to sneeze, which was worse.

Where the devil did it come from? Hades no doubt. The question had been bandied until the Chink, lounging beside the galley, sneezing with the rest, reasserted his view: "Typhoon come one time . . . catchee Hell, pleasantly . . . all plover!" He might have enlarged on this; but the watch had interfered and he retired clucking to his galley.

Then into the silence came a new sound, one heard only once before on this passage—a vast flutter of wings; a flutter which rose till it became a whirr as of the wind passing through pines . . . failed, died away.

The passing of birds as foretold by the tail-less one who lived in the galley.

Williams probably had an opinion on these matters, but he advanced none. No doubt he withheld it because Grey "spoke windily" of it as he had said; but actually it was because the subject touched his prejudices. The Bible was the Bible. Trade-winds existed because a wise God knew that without them sailors could never calculate on their passage. Why the trades became monsoons in the Indian Ocean only he did not state. That cyclones veered with the hands of the clock in the northern hemisphere and against them in the southern, was doubtless the result of some further "wise dispensation" about which man should be content to believe.

When the moon was in apogee or perigee and the phenomenon happened to coincide with a new or a full moon, the skipper would be wise enough in low latitudes to watch his barometer. But had any savant whispered of "cyclic factors" or produced an astrogeodetic chart to show the possible effect on the earth of the "quadrature, conjunction or opposition of planets" he would have answered: "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground but my Father which is in Heaven knoweth it."

Indeed there was very little accurate knowledge of volcanic phenomena in those days. In some circles it was considered unnecessary to solve them; in others a sign that the searcher was disinclined to accept the account given in Genesis—and therefore in danger of the Judgment, or, perhaps, of the Athanasian Creed.

Williams, if his mentality were justly understood, certainly would lean towards the latter view. But Grey, who only knew that the Athanasian Creed was said on certain Sundays, would have smiled at the notion. So it came about that in this period of many portents, when *Kow-Loon* was left by a dead monsoon to do her best among the reefs south of Carimata Island, left casually to preen her wings, drift ashore or keep to the ocean highway, Williams faced it as Noah faced the Deluge.

Another portent escaped the curtain that cloaks man from the Infinite for Grey to meditate as he kept his watch. Quite suddenly the sea assumed a new aspect. The whole surface of it glowed like a moonlit plain covered with snow; the sky black and pierced by very few stars. With it came a sensation to those on board that they floated upside down. The sea was

overhead, the sky underfoot—milky and luminous with dim blobs of flame pulsing in the undulations. From beneath the ship came long streamers of phosphorescent matter, flames which seemed to escape the keel and roll upward; the wake, such as it was, trailed away in fiery scintillation.

Luckily for man's sense of his relationship to the plain of his environment, it did not last. Grey, standing giddily gripping a shroud, did not pretend to understand it. Williams who had been lying for a time in a long deck-chair sprang to his feet and came to stand beside Grey. He looked over, saw "the inverted bowl we call the sky," said: "My God!" and returned dizzily to the compass. From his hurried movement it seemed that he suspected the helmsman of some trick to hasten the moment of his relief. But it was a trick of the sea; or the earth under it, which was beyond the control either of Captain or helmsman.

And as normality slowly returned the old man seemed to grasp what might be at hand. He called to the Chief: "Better keep the lead going, Mr Grey!"

Again, the watch drawing to a close, he lay in his chair oppressed by shadows he could not escape. It was more dark now. The stars veiled, the air hot and singularly acrid; the sails towering aloft untouched by wind. Then, suddenly, a crash shook the ship. It was not thunder. It was of no known quality. And after it the night simmered as before, tongue in cheek. A dozen questions and answers passed. Nothing had fallen from aloft. No one larking. The man on look-out presently chanted: "Lights bright and all's well!"

The Captain returned to his chair. "Getting jumpy," was his thought. "Must have been lying askew." Grey crossed the deck and presently was visible leaning over the rail. He seemed to be fascinated by what he saw, yet Williams was aware there was little enough to see; nothing at all events anyone could explain . . . and upon the thought, was erect in his chair, listening to the "*mene, mene, tekél upharsin*" of the Prophet as it brushed dimly by in the dark. So swiftly it came and passed, no one understood it.

A message from Krakatoa perhaps. A message from the Most High. . . . A tremor which took *Kow-Loon* in its arms and passed under her. For a brief minute the ship vibrated like a car driven at full speed over a corrugated track—Grrr! its tremendous note, then silence.

Williams was on his feet and beside Grey in a moment. "What's that?" he rasped, brusque, startled.

The Chief faced him, equally at fault.

"Thought she was ashore, sir," he said, glancing around—aloft. "But she's not."

"Sounded very like coral. . . . Yes, I agree. What water have you?"

"Twenty fathoms, sir, at three-fifteen, and," he added, "it's short of seven bells yet."

"Take another cast at once," came in response. "I—I don't like the sound of it." He purred as he waited, like a cat desiring to make friends.

He stared about him and the night simpered high under the dome mocking him, mocking them both. A star fell, as men say, drawing a long track and

promptly died. Perhaps another had climbed to take its place—or there was war in Heaven. . . . A glow appeared high up, like a magnesium flare far, far off—disappeared. The movements of the watch passing a line which trailed blobs of fire here and there over-side, gave sound in a tenebrous stillness that was profound.

Grey climbed into the mizzen chains and took the line in hand. He leaned out. "Let go!"

Then came through the dark voices which cried out: "Watch, there! Watch!" in tones calm or emulous, till Grey, standing erect in the chains, phosphorescence running through his fingers, said: "Bottom, sir," and gave the word to haul in.

"Avast!" Williams leaned out. "Let me feel her. . . . I must know. Can't understand it!" He climbed the rail, took the line, and *his* fingers now dripped phosphorescence. "Everything askew—topsy-turvy," he added, perhaps in explanation of his unbelief. Then: "Right!" as he acknowledged the Chief's accuracy. "Haul in!—Handsomely! Don't rush it." He took the mark in hand, felt it. No need for words. Twenty fathoms, one hundred and twenty feet of water lay between the ship's keel and ocean bed.

As they drew in the line the tremor recurred; but with greater violence—as if the Dark saw in the persistent attitude of this ship and her crew, some challenge of the finite to the Infinite. A blinding flash ensued; a whirligig of flashes all spraying in headlong attack, while a deep, metallic roar rolled about and about to confuse men, unhinge them and drown their cries. It waxed and waned; played as a ghostly

torch on each truck : ran slithering down backstays and plunged hissing in the sea——

And the sea, which is so mysteriously alert to resent blows, so ready to challenge when man is beset, sent back strange shapes which flopped and writhed on deck, and twisted in eccentrics overside.

Williams dropped the lead line and ran heavily to where the helmsman clung to a kicking wheel. Grey followed, and together they stood taking notes, feeling the pulse of darkness as sailors do when the unknown is at hand.

Orders came, jerkily given in the certitude that they would be carried out, while he who gave them quaked.

“Aye, aye, sir. . . . Just so.” The Chief, fumbling his way through that strange witch-dance, passed like one blind.

He reached the break of the poop and a whistle pierced the din—then followed a voice which said, as one who rehearses a part :

“All hands on deck ! Smart’s the word ! In royals and t’gall’n-s’ls . . . down stays’ls and flying jib—up mains’l . . . Idlers aft here, brail in mizzen”—and again in that black and rainless pause no wind, no sea, no anything men knew—“smart’s the word !”

Somewhere the crew responded. A great clatter of blocks and shouting ensued. Sails came swishing down the stays ; others rose from the clews and drew together amidships like birds folding their wings—high, high up on perches which crossed the heavens. Lightning winked and blinked afar off in that windless void . . . lightning which was blue or green or flame, all in a bewildering sequence, which seemed to make a target of that silent ship flourishing “*Om ! Mani padme, hum*”

on her scroll and would annihilate her. . . . Lightning which flared crookedly to the zenith, which flashed as powder in a pan ; which trickled about the yards and mastheads while every stay held its own blue corpsisant, its imp of light which rolled and spluttered in a stillness that was profound.

So airless was it, the night seemed dead ; so full of sound they might have been shelled. The world flamed up there where men searched for starry guides, the sea frowned back, black and sombre, giving gleam for gleam ; oily, sullen, brooding . . . where nothing stirred but the ocean bed and the *Kow-Loon* alone upon its breast castanetted her response.

It was the night of August the twentieth ; the end of the world at hand ; *Dies Iræ* for all those who lived, fought or made love near the Strait of Sunda which *Kow-Loon* was to pass.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

NOTHING came of that display, nothing commensurate in any degree with the titanic energy expended. The wind remained in its cave. Until dawn rain held aloof. Then it fell as from a sluice for ten windless, hopeless hours, and suddenly ceased.

To mock them the sun presently came out to grin at a drenched crew—men stripped to the waist, capless, with bare legs and feet; sails heavy with wet—then retired behind bars whence presently it sank, staining the world with blood.

Catspaws lay all round them at this time; occasionally one reached the ship and set her humming to the south; then back again—north-east for Flying Fish Reef and the islands they had passed. The men hauled yards about, hoisted staysails, let them run down, swearing the devil unable to find the Chink had fastened on the ship which hid his tail-less state. Like children they chattered, sitting in groups upon their heels, “ready for a call”; not one man of them honest in his opinion, but all certain that “something” had intervened to rob them of their accustomed peace. Where in God’s name is the monsoon? they asked—and found no reply. The two junior officers and Captain were in a like case. Grey alone of the Afterguard had a theory. And Grey did not talk.

Twice during the next few days they ran the booms out and set stuns’ls while all hands toiled on the halliards to “sweat up” sails when night appeared . . . singing, seeing visions as homeward-bounders do. They swore the girls had hold of her at last and would pluck her through. A day’s run! . . . two at the worst,

then they would be facing the honest sea, Anjer astern, and all the soft-eyed doves of Hong-Kong, Bangkok, Batavia or Saigon would not win from them a look . . .

The honest sea! China, Java and their shallow puddles—*Nan-hai*, *Hwang-Hai* and other Hais were as the sailor's workhouse, of which no good thing was known. Sunken rocks, reefs, shoals! "What odds? Weren't they skittering?" "Doing fifteen if she's doing a knot . . . and this time to-morrow we'll have Sunda astern . . ."

So they prophesied sitting like Malays on their heels, a dungaree jumper and pants their clothing; for a while forgetful, the Chink was still in the flesh. . . . Children every man of them; with a child's zest for games, stories, legends—and singularly versed in the art of putting them in words.

But neither Anjer nor Sunda was astern on the morrow; nor were the girls still pulling, as it seems they had promised. Some fickle one no doubt among them as a leader; men commented. Other ships and other crews nearer—what can a silly galoot expect? Well—they didn't expect. It was so. It was the law—always had been, always will be, world without end. Amen.

One thing was certain, if these factors were put aside as unproven, the *Kow-Loon* was tired of booming; her stuns'ls no longer helped her; stays'ls whanged and blocks clanged, while squalls moved up and moved back forgetful that sailors expect them to push home if they are fair, or keep out of it if they are foul. Squalls came up it is true, with a line of white against the leaden sky; but the line had no wind behind it; it was rain. Rain which fell upon the

crew, made them wet and left them for the sun to dry when it listed.

But the sun no longer looked down upon them. The heavens for some reason were charged with cloud ; dim, grey, and the men staring from under wet brows decided to forget the sun ; strip, wring out their kit ; squeeze the water from their hair and get robed in the clammy things as soon as may be. . . . Who could say what impended ? A damp world, my masters ; a world none too warm in spite of fires not far distant. Annoyance *in excelsis* for men who had pinned favours on the girls believing they would wear them.

Meanwhile an order came to take in stuns'ls, for the wind again drew ahead.

So, they worked ship, sometimes in a fresh breeze, sometimes in the laziest zephyr—zigzagging their way amidst the Thousand Islands. Always they crept west, nearer the Strait ; Anjer, where the great banyan tree stood beneath which were a bazaar, tom-toms, lutists, maidens who danced, and a caravanserai which lived solely and delightfully in the thoughts of those who passed.

Bumboats were there ; pumalows, bananas, oranges, monkeys, soft tack*—and maybe, if you had sufficient brass, a bottle or two of schnapps might reach your cabin to warm the cockles of your heart when the world was grey and wet. All these existed, just as the banyan tree existed with a village beneath its branches. Just as the Thousand Islands existed, splendidly equipped with faun and naiad, fountain and stream, hunters and hunted—as a perpetual Paradise for those lucky enough to reach them. . . .

* Bread, not biscuit, which on board-ship is called bread.

So it went on, fact and fable beautifully blended to Jack's undoing ; beautifully credible, desirable, if you are sitting on a spar, cold as a brass monkey and squeezing water from your hair ; or taking off your shirt to wring it and again wear it. The loin-cloth and bare buttocks of the coolies who run coal to the steamers in Eastern ports are better adapted to the conditions—and sometimes are.

A small breeze from the sou'-west again held. Stays'ls were asleep, the sails high aloft the colour of an iron church. The gear was being coiled down after the last tack, and a junior officer going the rounds to see all clear, when far in the west a glow appeared in the dun cloud which shrouded the high land at Sumatra's foot. Forty-five, fifty-five, seventy miles distant were these mountains, but the glow was not of their forging though it lighted them with an occulting glare, waving, waning ; while the cloud grew rosy above the Strait.

Aft on the poop Captain Williams used his glasses on that glare ; could make nothing of it and sent for the Chief who came aft at once. In answer to the old man's question he replied : " Too far off, sir ; but it looks like a fire of sorts."

" Not a doubt of it. Probably a ship on fire, or a bush-fire—eh ? "

" Rather a lot of rain about for a bush-fire, sir ? " Grey suggested.

" Yes—perhaps you are right."

" And," the Chief added, " rather a big flare for a ship."

" Then what do you suppose it is ? " came in irascible comment.

"Naturally, taking it in conjunction with the dust we've been——"

"Oh! that," he spluttered. "Nonsense, Grey! We should have heard it."

The first officer had his doubts and said so. The display, whatever it was, showed no sign of decreasing. It grew. It became bizarre, the clouds darker and more opaque; it shadowed the day while waves of light flared to the zenith like cirrus across a sunset sky.

"Well, whatever it is," Williams announced, "I don't like the look of it. Haul the mains'l up and let it hang in the gear."

The Chief moved to the break of the poop, gave the order and turned about to examine the cloud which did not advance as a squall should, but spread with a heavy and ominous slowness. On the main deck the crew were singing as they hauled; the mains'l was climbing to the yard and he could hear the officers directing affairs. "So! Belay that. . . . Well clew-garnet! Double on the buntlin's. . . ."

All going as it should. All hunky-dorum. No need to interfere. Then as he crossed to leeward, suddenly came the voice of the second officer advising him of some new hazard, crying out: "See that, sir?" and drifting away in explanation.

"See it? Grey would have been blind indeed to be blind at that moment. To leeward was an island girt half an hour ago with palms to the water's edge, now dim, but visible; and upon its beach ran will-o'-the-wisp gleams which danced and cut capers betwixt sea and jungle; skipped up, flared, popped, like a gas pipe pierced for hundreds of jets which the wind blew out and instantly relighted.

Grey came running aft, pointing. "Something bad coming, sir! See those lights?"

Williams posed straddle-legged beside the binnacle and gazing seaward, said: "Yes," then added: "If there's more wind in it I shan't be sorry . . . strange, this blackness, though!"

He came close to the compass, twisted the binnacle top, took a bearing of the island and stood back. Apparently he was calm, but Grey, watching very near, saw that he jerked and twitched, now a hand, now lips, now a sidelong shuffle, as though he strove to hide the fact that he twitched.

The darkness increased. It became so dense the skipper turned to his companion, saying: "I don't understand it. If it goes on we'll have to get our sidelights out . . . what?"

"I should turn tail and run for it," Grey tossed back, aware it was futile.

"I daresay you would. When you're as old as I am, Chief, you'll agree that hasty action is not always advisable. And where, if one may put it inoffensively, would you run?"

"Clear of Thousand Islands for a start. I would do that, and it would take some courage, too."

"I agree. And when you were clear of Thousand Islands what would you do? Run for Carimata Strait again—eh?" he sneered, looking sidelong under the peak of his cap. "Don't think you would, Chief, don't think you want any more of Carimata Strait than I do. Tell you what—go down an' take a reading of the barometer, and send— No. Never mind."

Grey moved away damning the futility which sought information of the barometer. Wasn't the thing

plain? Good God! A blind man could read it. Grey felt it in his bones, as he had said before, without in the least comprehending what the words implied.

It grew so dark that when he entered the cabin he struck a match beneath the skylight, and instantly became aware of a new tint. For a moment it flared out warm. He threw the match down and stamped on it . . . stood, twisting slowly, watching, intent, his heart thumping. "Like a rat in a trap," his thought, and faced about.

The cabin blazed with red light. The woodwork, glasses set in the swinging tray, all showed bright facets . . . the barometer, when he reached it, was pumping—but he did not read it. The light became so fierce it seemed the cabin must be on fire. He glanced about him. No. All correct. . . . Then came a vast, booming roar; a voice mysterious and full of menace speaking from the earth's centre, which shook the ship and hurled Grey across to the farther bulkhead.

Swiftly upon that came darkness, and he began like a blind man to fumble his way to the door, "Like a rat in a trap!" again in his mind. But how reach it? Which way—eh? Where the devil was the door?

The concussion had closed it. Creeping round he found it, methodically fastened it back on its hook, and ran up the companion-stairs, saying in his mind: "That settles it, anyhow. Not a doubt! None!"

A second explosion flung him as he emerged upon the poop, and a dim vision of the skipper struggling along, jerking arms into a long oilskin coat halted him. "Orders at last!" Again the criticism ran. They came as he rose and staggered past the fife-rail.

"Stand by halliards fore and aft! Sta-ta-ta-tar . . . Starboard watch up here, brail the spanker!" The sail was already furled. A gust caused the ship to heel and instantly the voice leapt: "Leg-go! Leg-go royal and 'gallant halliards! Leg-go smart!" The final word shrill as *Kow-Loon's* scuppers began to spout.

Grey reached in a trice and said: "Right! Sir . . . Shall I carry on?" Then, in a shout as the wind note rose: "No . . . I got no reading. She flung me . . . no time."

"True. Never mind . . . Leggo halliards! Never mind! It's on us now whatever! Clew up an' let 'em hang while we get her in hand. Put her under tops'ls an' fores'l, Mister Mate, then square main yard . . . No! Send watch aft. I want to get her before it at once . . . can't face that . . ."

The man's teeth chattered and Grey saw he was afraid.

"Quite!" he answered, aware it was late.

"Must run for it! Good God! the stuff's hot, Grey, burns!" Williams pointed to the cinder-strewn deck, drawing up the collar of his coat, dabbing his brow. "Yes, you were right. The last day, Grey." His voice rose quivering, unsound. "The second coming of our Lord! When the graves shall be opened and the seas give up its dead. Yea!" he chattered it out, talking to himself, standing forlorn and unready. "Yea, Lord Jesus . . . even so if it be Thy will."

He began to fumble with the buttons at his throat as a preacher in excitement tears at his neckbands. Forgot them and stooped, pushing away cinders that flamed near; brushed sparks from his coat, dabbed at

his cap, amazingly alert to fight what came. Small fires were starting here and there amidst coils of rope; molten mud and stones fell in heaps upon the deck, and the skipper, touched, perhaps, ran about kicking the stuff, scattering it, shouting: "Hot! Damned hot! And we are unready! Like the foolish virgins, Chief. Untrimmed lamps. No sidelights . . . Get 'em out! Get after-yards squared at once! Eigh! What the devil's that—Aft—aye, aft . . . as you will." He came close, his eyes blazing in a sort of ecstasy. . . . "You were right and I was wrong; but you argued from wrong knowledge. . . . Natural law and incredible theories. Pernicious! Dangerous! Never know where it will lead. All wrong!" He came near whispering, fantastic against the grim sky, "Judgment! The coming of our Lord to save sinners . . . and they who repent not shall be cast into the pit . . . where their worm dieth not, neither are they quenched!" He kicked at a mass which lay sizzling, and damned because it hurt his toe. "Water! Water! That's our need—yet unless it is the Lord's will no water will suffice . . ."

Grey came close and gripped his arm. "For all that, we will use it! Steady! for God's sake . . . Man at the wheel, Captain!"

"Steady it is! Now!" He stretched forth both arms. "I'm going to put her before it for the Lord has called. . . . Make a clean breast of it and cleanse us from all unri . . ."

A shower of hot stuff fell and he squirmed, while men on the main deck rushing for cover, shouted of their hurts. Stones, scoriæ, ashes—the air was full of it; stuff flung from the pit whence came the flame

which seemed in that hopeless moment to reach the zenith. Straight in the dark it climbed, a geyser-like spout of mud and ashes which would fall on the nearer lands and bury them ; bury the ship if she could not escape.

" Buckets ! " Grey shouted from the ladder the skipper pushed aside. " Fling water about ! Two at the head pump ! Flood the deck ! Get wet ! Wet everything ! "

Men and officers got to work in spite of burns and those who groaned. They drew water and dipped their heads in it ; flung water one upon another in a frenzy of wrath ; wound jerseys about their heads and shoulders ; plugged the scuppers and set a flow of water upon the decks.

Captain Williams, watching high on the poop, in spite of his belief, found a bucket and used it panting. It seemed to steady him. He drew more water and flung it about where fire appeared. If he was to burn in the immediate future, he would burn with the Lord's fire, in conditions which would not be so appallingly painful. Besides, if he burned now, how was the sea to give back its dead when the Trump called him ?

By degrees he became more calm. This work of slinging water about was proving his salvation. He must keep himself in being, a man, ready to meet his God when called. Nothing else mattered. . . . Then, in a drifting interval when the wind died, and the ship found an even keel, it struck him they were escaping the peril which for some headlong minutes had unmanned him.

He came farther aft, threw a bucket of water upon

the skylight and approached the man at the wheel. "Burned at all?" he asked, head thrust forward, inquisitive to read.

"No, sir—not to speak about."

"Good. . . . Put your helm up. Let her go off before it. The mouth of Hell yawns but the hour is not yet! Hard up and meet her—understand?"

The ship fell off slowly. On the weather side of the poop some of those set free by the Chief were hauling on the braces. The ship was nearly half-way round, the wind on her quarter, when a hurricane gust screamed over her. Hot, like the breath of an open furnace it came, and instantly the roar and whang of loose canvas rang fore and aft. A spar crashed from aloft; split sails streamed out flickering; like whips they cracked high overhead while the gale, sudden, fierce, pressed down this ship which had played with time.

Grey scrambled along the poop calling out: "Steady helm, there! Don't get her by the lee. In with those braces! Smart now! Hold her there, Mr Cobham . . . Hold her!"

By some chance this was accomplished while the wind roared past; but *Kow-Loon* had the bit in her teeth, yawing wildly. "Steady there! Small helm!"

The Chief reached the binnacle. The helmsman lay in a heap beside the wheel; Williams, his coat blown out, stood on the leese, steering. . . .

"A hand to the wheel there," sang Grey. "Let me have her, sir." He gripped the spokes while the fresh hand climbed near. *Kow-Loon* heeled badly; came back with a jerk . . . and suddenly, swiftly as it had come the gust was spent.

Williams was sitting on the wheel gratings now, his face buried in his hands. An eerie silence fell. The rush of water alongside, the crisp bow wave flung in those racing minutes, died. High up in the dark they heard the sails flapping, spars clanging and looked one at the other amazed. The fresh hand at the wheel could see but the loom of canvas blending with the dark.

A voice cried :

“Now, then—in with her while it’s quiet. Dead square, Mr Cobham !”

Grey was in charge. Williams had not moved. One of the men passing asked if he were hurt, drawing attention to his attitude.

“God knows, I will see presently,” Grey returned. But at that moment he was puzzling what he must do. If the man had lost his nerve only, he might be able keep him as a sort of figure-head ; but if his brain suffered, then he must be supplanted.

A strange note came to stir them. It sounded like the swish of a multitude of birds passing in the darkness. It increased so rapidly they discovered its direction, and the men rushed to gaze out there on the port quarter where it was night. They saw the sea alive with swift spear-heads of light, thousands of them moving straight for the ship and spreading out fan-wise as they came near.

The noise became a vast hiss, the sea filled with lightning flashes which streamed by at an immense speed, rippling the surface like a shoal of herring fleeing before a charge of dog-fish. Fish they were, but not herring. Fish of all sorts and sizes, the mass small, but all mad with fright, rushing pell-mell from the sea which was their world.

As they neared the ship some passed under her, others forward, aft; others again essayed to leap over her and fell wriggling, with gaping gills and open jaws upon the deck. A cry went up from the main hatch: "Snakes! Snakes! Gawd! Stand clear, sons! . . ." A rush aft, and the crew were all on the poop staring down, scared without doubt, and listening to things that flopped, heroically striving to swim. Overside a few belated flashes lingered. The hissing died and again there was peace.

Grey stood before the compass. That, too, was dark. It was broad day, yet it was dark. He called to the third officer: "Send one of them to light the binnacle lamp. Afterwards see to the sidelights and set a hand on the lookout."

Raffles came for the lamp and presently returned kicking at the smouldering patches as he approached. "Will she catch fire, sir?" he asked, as he stood there fixing the lamp.

"Not if we keep her wet, dear old boy," Grey answered. "Keep handy and don't lose the number of your Mess!"

"I'll try . . . but there's a flame on the main yard, sir . . . I saw it as I passed."

Grey moved swiftly forward and saw. "Drop the main buntlin's!" he shouted. "Quickly! Let go with a run." Apparently that sufficed, there was a clatter and some hissing as the stuff fell; then silence. The Chief came to the wheel and looked at the helmsman—one of England's sons, strong, ready with quip and laugh, but now quiet—and to him he said: "Keep her north-east."

This order seemed to rouse Captain Williams. He

got up, holding his head with both hands, came to the binnacle and stooped over it. Grey did not speak. He still wondered what he must do—if the old man interfered.

The Captain said: "Yes—you were right, Grey. But the facts were wrong. . . ." Then, turning to the man at the wheel: "Brush you left shoulder! Quick!"

The man did so. "A bit of hot stuff!" commented the skipper. "A brand plucked from the burning." Again to the Chief: "Are you prepared to fight it, Mr Grey?"

"As long as I can stand, sir."

"Good—but what can you do against the wrath of God?"

"It's Krakatoa we're up against; not God Almighty, Captain Williams. . . ."

"Not a sparrow falleth to the ground," came in stern tones, "but my Father which is in Heaven knoweth it. . . ."

He turned away still holding his head and entered the companion.

Hot stuff continued to fall. Pumice, dust, scorix; but the mud no longer reached them. The wind which had passed with the roar of a gale no longer troubled them. True, a breeze existed which easily might drive them upon some island as they groped their way from the Strait. The lightning aided them here. It flashed without sound. In silence the black cloud flickered with flame, glowed and again was black. Light clove the dark with kaleidoscopic changes, endless, wonderful, and by it they emerged.

The island with its strange equipment of blinking gas-jets they passed at length, feeling their way before a steady breeze. Beyond it, to the north-east was greater sea-room, and they made for it, working the lead; for north of Thousand Islands are reefs, shoals, patches of foul ground, and until North Watcher, Arnemuïdan or Etna is passed there is no safety for a ship bound up Java Sea.

In his cabin sat Williams, the Bible on his knees, sin and the cause of it heavy on his mind. He had no thought of the hazard they ran; of his attitude as Commander, of his refusal to consider, until it was too late, his Chief's advice—he was consumed by other trouble; saw the hand of God heavy upon him, wrathful, malevolent, pressing him down. He remembered the prayers he had used, the hours given to God, that God might look mercifully on him in his need—and this ensued. He did not repine. He searched for the reason and could find none.

True, he was amazed; his mind full of thought, contrition, defence, excuse; full of an extraordinary piety and confusion. He could not sit still, nor could he walk. He was in pain—he put it so—pressing with his hands to his head. What was to do? Was there a gale, or a calm? What had occurred that he was no longer on deck? The questions became inextricably mixed, muddled—he could make no head with them. . . . None!

He remembered the gale which had sprung upon them just when everything was adrift; how hot it was: how malevolent: how it had come when darkness covered them and the Hand of the Lord was lifted to strike. . . .

How he had prayed—without result ! Rocks and reefs abounded. There were no lights to guide them, only the terrible flicker of a burning world reflected high up everywhere pointing the way they must go. But who gave orders ? Grey ? He could not say. Something struck him and he felt dizzy. Perhaps Grey saw him fall and took charge . . . but what was to do now ? Had the men seen, or heard, any of them, what he had said ? He sat glowering. Low on the cabin floor he sat holding with cupped hands a head that throbbed, burned—gave him hell.

He got up slowly and bandaged his head, all the time wondering how deep was his lapse, what he had *said*. With his eyes askew, motionless, he strove to recall his words. None came—then “though your sins be as scarlet . . .” Who said it ? Had he ? And if so—— ?

With more imagination Williams might have lost control now—yet he lived mumbling. Grey had this faculty ; but he would not lose control. Given the necessary shock the skipper might lose his reason ; Grey never. In this wise men stagger on their way carrying burdens which none may assuage.

The Chief’s voice reached him as he sat considering his case. It cried out sharply : “Drop the main-t’gallant buntlin’s. Quick, before she takes hold,” and running swiftly to a port, spry and alert as a youth, the skipper caught sight of a cresset of flame twisting high over the yard.

The sail fell with a clang and some hot stuff came down. Men jumped on it. He questioned again : “What must he do ? ” and rubbed at the glass with his hand.

From the ship's waist came the wash of water as she rolled; the swish of water thrown from buckets on places the hose could not reach; the rush of men picking up bits of pumice, dipping occasionally a piece in water and pocketing it to show the girls as a curio—girls who had already deserted them for others!

Like children they played with notions; like men they were alert, casting wise glances aloft, at the rails, the rigging—anywhere where the stuff might find lodgement and get vicious. Like children they watched the “fireworks” over Sunda; the cloud-curtain which screened them from the sun, the pulsing life of the depths; yet permitted the rumbling jar of an earthquake to pass unnoticed. “The old gentleman’s at it again—stokin’ up,” they supposed; “but weren’t they just skitterin’ away out of it,” and “wouldn’t they presently all be at home, footin’ it in Lime’ouse with the gells?”

The skipper, watching in the silent entrance and keeping clean the glass through which he peered, groaned aloud. They had no sense of an impending doom. No knowledge! Hell or Heaven, all one—all one . . .

Someone shouted as a question for debate: “Home? Aye—England, my son. A country where there ain’t no bloomin’ earfquakes, ner ’ot stuff fallin’ from the sky; ner mosquitoes. . . . ’Ome? Aye! that’s me. God send I’m there this time three months wiv or wivout my shirt. . . . Hi, there! Chum—on your port bow! Dowse ’im!”

They might have been calling attention to the coming of a rat, or a snake, or the devil; but one

pointed to the growth of a small flame which rose where gear was coiled in the port main-rigging. "Let him 'av it!"

With a swish of the hose the thing died spluttering.

They noticed, too, that the water they pumped and drew from alongside was not what it had been. They discovered that if they flung a bucket of it, large and small blobs of fire spread about the decks—phosphorescent fire—and wondered. They noticed also that the sea was getting confused; that the *Kow-Loon*, responding to it, had begun to roll again. And when presently a wave swished past them with the swirl and roar of a vessel running heavily in the forties, they omitted to consider what it all presaged.

True they were busy with the gear, with the sails which were blown to ribbons, with others which they had tied up; with the hose, with buckets, and had little time to consider what might be their destiny or whither they moved in the dusk of a day that was dead.

They saw the sea curling up astern run past them for no earthly reason but sheer cussedness, phosphorescence lighting it, outlining it, falling in starry cascades from its crest. They caught the wind note high up; felt its breath—hot, like the breath of a desert—as it swung eerily past to the full pressure of a gale. . . . Saw the ship heel under it and go smoking through a sizzling whiteness that lay against the dark, like snow in a crevasse—knew that it died as before.

Hot was the wind. It seemed to dry men up as they stood clinging again to the rigging watching it scoot, and labelling it "Queer!"

The skipper, the old exaltation upon him, stayed

where the wind came not ; watched, but without fear. Ready perhaps to meet his God.

In half an hour no evidence of this "queerness" remained. The gale had passed, the Lord had not come. A breeze from the sou'-west carried them onward, pushing them slowly from the black shutter which stood between them and the sun. But the ship moved with a swing now which no one quite understood. Sometimes she swayed ; but no reason appeared. Sometimes she seemed uncertain whether to rise to a sea, or to let it glide over her—whether to change feet as she approached, or to "take a running jump at it and chance the odds."

The men put it so, staring at the evidence. They could not understand it. Nor could the officers.

Horizons had vanished. Stability was in the melting-pot ; balance in the scales. *Kow-Loon's* hold upon the sea, her seaworthiness after forty-eight years' service was in question—not the conditions she faced. They were ignorant of those conditions, knew nothing of that great tropical sea on which they sailed, hot and electric, teeming with life, algæ, fucus, sun or moon-fish, giants which were thrust from their homes down there amidst an undersea jungle of wonderful beauty. They saw only what came before them ; the hot stuff, the phosphorescent blobbiness of the water ; the fish that flopped on board and sometimes stayed there.

"Fish ! Dead fish !" one shouted, at whose feet it had dropped.

"Your sister's fish !" came back grimly in answer. "Hang on to that gantlin' afore she lurches a-top o' you . . ."

"She"—the *Kow-Loon* you observe, not the sea nor the cause of her lurchings. And when all is considered, what other miracle was comparable to the fact of their escape. They still ran. They had not piled her up. She was not on fire. Their burns dabbed with oil and grease smarted less.

Still, the curtain lying over the Strait was blacker than before. Thousand Islands, Batavia, Etna, North Watcher, any and all of them, were behind its folds. Black night stood over them when it was day; the hum of a gale where very little wind was; the shock and roar of earth's travail as it stooped under the blows dealt her.

Without warning what could a man do? Without vision how blame him if he mistook the land for the sea? Standing on decks strewn with pumice; dust and pumice and rock falling about them, men worked conscious they were up against something, as they put it, that no one understood. It wasn't like a gale, they argued, nothing even like a typhoon; you knew what to do with things of that sort—so did *Kow-Loon*. Had she not emerged triumphant after many experiences? But this?

With wet mufflers and jumpers tied about their heads, looking like the sailors of phantasy on the theatre, they went about the work of the moment and asked no questions, expecting all things.

From minute to minute is a long period when you are facing death. To prevent men thinking, orders come which may, or may not, be essential. From the port beam as *Kow-Loon* slid away in the dark a new note arrived.

The ship slowly stooped.

An order from the Chief Officer, on watch high on the poop, followed: "Get aft here all hands—smart!" and the crew made a rush to obey. "Something coming! Move!"

A great sea entered the dim circle which enclosed them, a sea so great it made men dizzy to watch it roaring and foaming as it advanced. It did not come by stages in the manner of great seas, but in one long line like a range of hills suddenly launched down a slope—tremendous, impossible to avoid, but unhurried.

Again the voice: "Get hold there, Sonny! Lash yourselves!"

Kow-Loon stooped so far in the hollow the thing sucked, the sails clanged aback. And as she slowly rose it smote her broad on the bow—one smashing blow, and passed over her leaving her decks full; the house amidships a maze of torn teak, the bulwarks wrecked.

The ship leaned over to starboard, heavy with top weight, sagging, winged. A spar torn from its lashings swept aft on the flood and rammed the cabin front. It pierced the teak and hung there twisting in the swirl of escaping water. Other waves followed, smaller, less able to tear, and the men loosing their lashings at the word, moved off to secure it. They called one to the other in the dark: "That you, Tom?" "Aye, lad; what's left of me." "Anyone hurt?" "Gawd knows!"

Then the Chief: "Get a line round the fore end and heave it taut. Secure it where it lies."

Work, you perceive, though Hell yawned. Work while water gushed from the ports, slowly easing the ship's burden . . . work at the yards and sails, trim-

ming them afresh—then one speaking in a queer croak :

“She’s runnin’ for it . . . There’s a breeze, oh Gawd !” He stood up waving arms, staring at the sea, and added : “She’s away from it—— Sure ! She’s away . . .” Mazed he stared about and lurched upon the spar like one whom the sea has slain.

Beyond the spar were the torn bulwarks.

No one came near. No one heard. The man lay where he fell. His mates knew they were running, that the cloud was astern ; that dust and cinders no longer troubled them, that the afternoon was speeding—night in the van.

What else of use remained for them to learn ?

Again came the cry of birds passing high in the dusk.

The rest was silence—a ship lurching, ridding her decks of the weight that burdened her.

And still Captain Williams remained undecided, alternately in his cabin and at the port.

What was he to do ?

Perhaps he might brazen it yet. Was he not bandaged, shockingly bruised ? Whisky aided him here.

CHAPTER VII

NICHT WAHR?

DAWN after a night of wanton buffetings; the crew gathered in a group about the mizzen five-rail to watch it.

High up it towered as though earth and sea burned and a fan sucked up their essence as the sand in a simoon is drawn heavenward. Dark blue-green nimbus, slashed and scarred with amber flame—green on high, red from the pit where couched the sun; barrier clouds, brazier cirri, gossamer wisps, dust, dust—all fantastically whipped to reach the crowded arch of heaven that bent over Java Sea.

Close upon the ship's tracks the mists of night arose; from the decks, from the sea alongside, from the gurgle and spray of its challenge—up through the dawn all strayed like smoke driven by a breeze. Marvellous for an hour of growth and decay it was; a riot of colour which left the grey world more grey, the ship lurching amidst the greyness more dim than when night wrapped her close, disclosing her shape in fire . . . then a voice chanting as though it were expected: "Sail ho!"

Another day begun. Far off amidst clouds the silhouette of a brig tumbling in seas which ran criss-cross from all quarters, which slopped about staid *Kow-Loon's* decks playing with dead fish which lay behind spars, giving new life to gasping oddments that flicked at the hard planks striving to swim, together with scoriæ, mud and weeds which crossed from side to side with every roll.

Captain Williams was on deck, encouraging the others by his presence and pressing occasionally the

bandage that wrapped his brow. He had sinned and with the officers made his peace. The pain he "suffered when struck down had maddened him"; but he minimized, because they were not apparent, the intensity of his burns. "To the mercy of God and to no other power" he attributed his escape. Consider for one moment the condition of the man who was struck down beside him. Dead, was he not? And the inference: "Had I been on that side of the wheel, inevitably I would be dead—now, at this minute . . ."

The officers visualized the scene in silence. Then Grey came to his assistance—Grey who had been busy and knew less than nothing of the affair; yet had no desire to make life more difficult for the old man. If he played the game, he told Elgar, he would do all he could to aid him. In sober truth he could do no less for a skipper must be very mad ere he is superseded.

And now for an hour Williams and Elgar had been watching the approach of the vessel they had sighted at dawn. She carried no sail and soon it became evident she moved under steam, her course so laid that she must cross *Kow-Loon's* track.

By eight bells she had come near. Presently she rounded to and slowed her engines. The Dutch flag went up. Bugle calls announced a change of watch and it was plain they were in touch with a vessel of the Dutch Navy. *Kow-Loon* hoisted the Red Ensign, intending to signal, but the gunboat came closer, turned on a parallel course and stopped within hail.

"What ship is that?" came with a Dutch twang as the two rolled abreast.

"*Kow-Loon!* What ship is that?"

"*Buitenzorg*, of ze Dutch Royal Navy. Where are you from?"

"Hong-Kong."

"Where bound?"

"London. What has happened in the Straits?"

"Krakatoa in eruption. Ze Strait is blocked. Where were you when it occur?"

"West of Thousand Islands."

"So! Any damage?"

"Decks swept, several hands lost—where were you?"

"Cruising since nine of yesterday to intercept sheeps and to turn zem back. Hold! I send a boat to examine your papers and note your damages while I give instructions. You are becalm—no?"

"Absolutely."

In ten minutes a cutter was plunging alongside a pilot's ladder which had been dropped from the *Kow-Loon's* rail.

A lieutenant and two sailors climbed on board and were received by the Chief with: "You make a glad sight for sore eyes, sir. Last night I scarcely thought we would be lucky enough to meet anyone again."

"The same mit ourselves. I am happy it is not the caze ziss time. Zipp!" He glanced along the deck, "You get it pretty bad all right. My man take note while we arrange what you do. Zat understood?"

"Yes—but what is this about the Strait being blocked? Surely there will be a passage in two or three days?"

"In two or three munce, perhaps there may be a passage. Who can say? Krakatoa make himself very busy zis time. Other volcanoes of Java, fifteen,

perhaps twenty, join him an' help him do what he want; perhaps he no finish yet! Oh! yes. He may begin all over again in ten minutes or in ten muncce. How can we say? Zere are forty-six volcanoes in Java, Sir Captain; some asleep as we thought; but not asleep now . . . I tell you quite plain . . . Where Anjer Point lay, is now for many miles a lake or the sea. Who knows? It is joust the biggest *affaire* we have experience since more than one hundred years, you understand zat? But I show you on your chart if you permit."

"Come into the cabin. I will introduce my Captain. He was hurt. Come and see him, it will do him good."

As they passed under the break of the poop the Lieutenant caught sight of the spar which had rammed it. "Zipp!" he exclaimed again, his lips tight, "zat a nasty one . . . anyone kill?"

"Four men missing. God knows when or how—several badly hurt."

"So. It generally happen that way when ursequake come. We lose thirty, forty thousand peoples, perhaps more—all go wizout anyone know how."

They reached the cuddy where Williams met them, explained his hurts and sat down to examine the chart which Grey unrolled.

"See here," the Dutchman laid a finger on the land behind Anjer Point and swept a circle. "All zat is gone. In the Strait there rise islands as Krakatoa rose long ago, before my Nation or yours know anysing of Java. Also wizout doubt there will be rocks an' shoals—perhaps no passage at all such as it was . . . No lighthouse—all gone . . ."

"But surely it will be possible to find a way through," Williams urged.

"Until Krakatoa get quiet an' we are able to find landmarks for survey, it is impossible to permit ships to pass by Sunda Strait. Zose are my orders."

He stood there facing these two, but gazing with visionary blue eyes far beyond either, the gold lace and buttons on his uniform tarnished, his face dark, oppressed by a sense of the immensity of this disaster.

"You see that it is so? I do not have to explain to sailors of your Nation zat in these waters where zere is no survey zere is no passage."

Williams agreed. Indeed he had little inclination for further experiments with danger and scarcely understood the drift of his own question. "As a matter of fact," he explained laboriously, bending low to hide the twitching facial muscles, "I have no wish to see either Sunda or Krakatoa again for all time . . . but there *is* a way out somewhere, I suppose?"

"Unless, Captain, Krakatoa has persuaded all his friends to help him block zem," the Lieutenant smiled.

"Impossible, sir!" Williams ejaculated and paused twitching.

"Perhaps yes; perhaps no—*Nicht wahr?* There may be by Bali Strait—a not very big passage at any time; or Lombok, or Alas Strait—very bad always for sailing ship—or Sapeh Strait farzer east. Ou—aye! But volcanoes have been active everywhere. There may be dangers in any of them we know not of. . . . Better go to east by Flores Zee an' Banda Zee to Arafura Zee an' so to the west coast of Australia . . ."

"A long way and a bad way, sir," the Captain fumed. "I am not on a voyage of discovery and

have no large-scale charts to carry me through these seas."

"Zen why not go up Macassar Strait an' home round the Cape Horn?"

The audacity of this proposal seemed to deprive Williams of speech; but after a moment he explained that until he was clear of the islands the same reason applied. "Besides which," he added, "look at the distance!"

"True! It is long."

"Can you spare me a chart of the Banda and Arafura passage?"

"Alas, no. We have but one an' to-morrow may be ordered Eass to discover what has happened zere also?"

"Then you know there has been trouble to the eastward?" Grey asked as he looked up from the chart and caught sight of the skipper brooding at the head of it.

"Without doubt—perhaps more far." He stood up patting with his pencil on the chart, his eyes tired. "I tell you zere are forty-six volcanoes in Java, and beyond in the islands are ozzers, all ze way up to Philippines and Japan. The earth," he drummed staccato, "in ziss part of the world is thin. Beneath it is much energy and the number of volcanoes is but a result . . .

"Long ago—ages perhaps—Java, Sumatra, Borneo, New Guinea, Australia an' *all ze islands which are between*, were one great, immense continent, like Africa, or Soud America. Perhaps there would be no sea here, no *Nan-Hai*, no *Hwang-Hai*, no Japan Sea. Some great lakes only; all joined togezzer at Malay

Peninsula as North and South America are joined at Panama—— Enormous!” He puffed it out, eyes wide. “Zere would ensue in consequence of that, a better balance in the structure of ze earth, a greater solidity. It is possible, too, in consequence of zis solidity, that the volcanoes would be fewer, less powerful—an’ Krakatoa would not himself have been able to push up his ugly nose and say to the land *bon voyage* when he tip it into ze sea. Now it all depends on Krakatoa. If he becomes very busy, as of late—zen he releases the pressure which holds up still, great tracts of land, an’ zey sink under the sea, an’ all the peoples who are on this land go down too—Quick! too quick for time to say prayers. *Nicht Wahr?*”

Captain Williams, listening and in vigorous dissent, challenged at once :

“No, sir—not so is God’s world. As I see it in runs like this—‘In six days the Lord made Heaven and Earth and all that is therein, and rested on the Seventh day.’ You infer that God left an unfinished world . . .”

“Zen how you account for zese *affaires* of our friend Krakatoa an’ uzzers—many, many ozzers?”

“Visitations, Lieutenant. . . . The Wrath of God made manifest for the sins of the people.”

“Peoble—what peobles—here zere are many?” the Lieutenant shrugged.

“Ah, that is in the hands of God. Who are we that we should question the acts of the Almighty?”

“So—you believe that?”

“Absolutely—any other theory is impossible.”

“Pardon—no, not impossible. The theory of

pressure is a known fact. What once existed may by the exercise of pressure exist again, Captain."

Williams made no reply. His expression was that of one whose Faith was proof against argument, but his lips twitched.

"Observe!" The Dutchman swept a finger down the chart from Siam and China to Australia. "Everywhere are islands, rocks, shoals. Some of the islands are large—ozzers small, but consider it as you will they are just the peaks and high lands of a continent which once reached from here to there." Again his finger passed, this time from Tasmania to Cochin China. "All one land, sir; sunk in the fight which exists always where fire and water can get one at the ozzers . . .

"For the moment I believe Krakatoa is more tame than has been the caze for hundreds of years. In his fight wiz the sea his cone has split and the sea has reached the heart of him. Put him out!" He hammered his belief with clenched fist on the chart. "You hear his explosions? Immense—was it not? Zat 'appen when the zea come in contact with the lava which lie white-hot in his belly . . . perhaps a sousand feet below zee level. There steam is made. Immense! An' so, for a time he die . . . yet, if now he is tame zere are ozzers who will help him to get strong. Then he come back, for he is zere . . . zere—waiting always to fight again ziss sea which is his enemy. . . .

"Perhaps one day I see that too. Perhaps my baby, who at ziss moment is with my wife in Batavia, will see it—perhaps neiser of them will ever see anysing again. *Nicht wahr?* . . . perhaps. Only God knows. But

it come. It come in a moment—like zat!” He released his end of the chart and in a second it was rolled—click! a blue cylinder with its insignia on the top corner confronting the group. “Like zat!” he emphasized, leaning forward. “Swift! Wiz no time to say prayers . . .”

He stood before them visibly overwrought, not seeing either, but reading the epitome of some vast and inscrutable law—as the destiny of man, who exists only that he may die; or of the force ever present and active in this island which the English had given back to his Nation after sampling its quality; or perhaps, simply because of the altruistic tendency inherent in all sailors, which was his birthright. His gaze fell and Williams seized his opportunity.

“And the chart, Lieutenant? Am I to suppose it is impossible to get one?”

He pressed his bandages, his eyes closed.

“Alas, yes. The charts are stored in Batavia and may even now be buried under ashes and dust. Or swept inland like ze *Berouw* of our Dutch Navy which rests more zan one mile beyond Java Sea . . . I know nussing . . . my Captain he know nussing alzo—an’ we have at Batavia, each of us his wife an’ children who perhaps are dead . . .”

A sudden jarring motion of the deck told them, if that were needed, how insecure was life at this moment. It brought them quickly to their feet; each alert, listening as those do who live in the earthquake zones. They stood where a moment before they had sat. And again, as the tremor passed, they heard the voice of the Lieutenant emphasizing his view:

"All linked, Sir Captain. Every one of them all round the Pacific basin, while the sea rolls everywhere searching out the weak place that it may enter and put out ze fire."

Captain Williams crossed the cabin and touched a bell. He refused further argument. He had his own views which nothing would alter.

In a few minutes the steward entered carrying a tray on which were set whisky, Hollands and glasses, all jingling as just now those in the rack in the skylight had jingled, each in its own key.

Captain Williams led now. He seemed to have regained control, and he led in the time-honoured fashion at sea:

"Help yourself, sir . . . Grey, which is your poison? We will forget the earth and consider ourselves. Mine's whisky." He reached over and pulled a box nearer, opened it and took out a cheroot. A smile dawned as he rolled it between finger and thumb at his ear. "Help yourselves . . . we go hence when the Omnipotent in His mercy calls us."

They took what they desired and stood with lifted glasses bowing gravely one to the other, while spoons and bottles crept jingling to the far side of the tray.

The Captain's brows twitched. He found the situation more difficult the longer it lasted. He said jerkily:

"A safe return, Lieutenant, to those who are in Batavia, and may they be there, if God so wills it, to meet you. .\ ."

"Sanks, Sir Captain—but of ziss I am certain. If Krakatoa was able to reach zem, zen they are not zere —*Nicht wahr?*"

The Chief entered hurriedly into the breach and said :

“To all who are in this mix-up, ashore or afloat, strength to carry on !”

And they drank listening to the jingle of spoons.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GEYSER

AGAIN it was night, dark, implacable, and the ship tumbling along before a westerly breeze. Gusty and unstable it was, blowing sometimes hot, sometimes with the chill of winter—unlike any wind known to the men who had thrashed *Kow-Loon* to the edge of Carimata Strait.

How unstead were the conditions they had not yet fully learned. In a sea of so many gravitational desires it seemed unlikely they would have time to learn. Its movements were as fluky as the wind. It leaped from the tinkle of a tide-rip to the swirl of a maelstrom with the swiftness and subtlety of one born to cajole. It struck no blow but it appeared to have measured the chances of victory—yet in their hearts and in spite of their maledictions the men knew these things hurt them not because they were accursed; not because of devils who watched over the grave of a Chink and his galley, nor because the influence of Carimata Strait weighed; but because Java Sea is shallow and its bottom twisted beneath them while the sea was busy with its answer.

Again, as men stared into the void, towards midnight came the roar of the earthquake wave which already had swept them and left them smarting. As a giant it fell upon them, sounding its bore-like dirge—whether of earth or sea the gods alone knew. Out of the dark it leaped, crashed, showering dim gleams and passed sucking into the void. In its wake remained *Kow-Loon* a little more dizzy, a little more shaken, staring at what the sea had stolen.

Astern was the black curtain that hid the Strait by

day and now was a curtain which intermittently flamed. It blotted out the lights of Batavia and smothered the Thousand Isles as with a cloak. Astern, perhaps, was the Dutch gunboat and her friendly but pragmatic Lieutenant cruising in the smother while *Kow-Loon* escaped. Perhaps she was intercepting other ships caught by Krakatoa and seeking to persuade their skippers to circumnavigate the world without the essential charts. Perhaps, like *Berouw*, she, too, now rested among the fields behind the capital.

Everything was in flux: a *mélange* of guesswork, stupidity, horse-sense, blows and defence defying criticism or analysis; but wholly wonderful when you consider the forces which stirred. All night these men wrought, went aloft battling, came down to find they still must battle—shaggy, burned, bruised, wet; uncertain whether it were possible to get food or to dry; whether it were any good if they could; whether it were not better nakedly to take the plunge and have done with it. . . . Came down to find the dawn glowing, *Kow-Loon* still busy brushing fireflies before her, still leaving a trail of them astern . . . busy as ever, hard as ever, the teak of *Hind* her salvation and her charm.

How look at the world askew with that in view? Had she not endured? In spite of her forty-eight years, had she yielded? Never had she failed the men who sailed her. Cyclones had dismantled her, but always new spars were at hand on which it had been possible to spread canvas, reach port and refit. The reefs she had touched had let her pass lightly, and the crews who manned her were of the race who, if it makes blunders, knows how to retrieve them.

Day after day the hazards of an earthquake period accompanied this ship and dawn looked out of the east to spy her state after night had done with her. She seemed to be endowed : one to whom positive harm could not come ; yet deep at the heart of things were factors which might see her cast away or triumphant—as the gods willed.

Her gods were of the East, her theology that of the sacred Lord Buddha, whose bonze once stood over her in Bangkok and uttered the mystic "*Om ! Mani padme, hum,*" which is carven on wood and stone in Buddhist lands for men and fools to read and once was graven on her shield.

Who shall say ? Prayers sink deep in spite of those who mock ; in spite, too, of some very singular elucidations given by those who would explain the inexplicable and live as seers. Yet faith remains. . . . Faith ! Faith ! that was the note she struck. Trust even as I trust who am obedient to your laws and ye shall be saved.

How far these credenda would save her now that Faith had gotten a twist no bonze could foresee, is but one of the many riddles time and the efforts of man might decide.

Grey would have none of these fables. Williams would swear by those in which he believed calling them Truth. That, perhaps, was one of the factors which contributed to Grey's ikon-smashing propensities—as a man face fo face with weakness in a ruler tends always to hardness.

Williams, and Williams' fugitive hopes and fears while he remained in control, were the rocks which

at this time threatened not only the crew but the ship. Grey knew this as did the officers, but on him it weighed more heavily. Still, they had come six hundred miles in six or seven days, and when night closed in they lay east of Surabaya and south of the Kangean Islands—which are the western group of the archipelago lying south of Celebes.

At this time they were heading for Lombok Strait, the widest of a series of outlets to the Indian Ocean. If the wind held Williams had decided on Grey's advice to attempt the passage; but already as they drew nearer the breeze was failing. In spite of that Grey argued it could be done. It would not always remain calm. He had before him a recollection of the skipper's new irascibility born of the strain he had endured, and a very fair knowledge of the conditions farther east. As a matter of fact, Williams' mentality was arraigned; but because it is impossible to depose an officer who has given no legal evidence of incompetence, Grey was compelled to mark time.

"I don't understand," Williams complained once again, "why you are so anxious to run this risk?"

"I see it as the lesser evil, sir. Get near the Strait and wait your chance."

"What is the greater?"

"Java Sea, the reefs and islands reaching away nearly to Api in Banda Sea after this upheaval. That Dutchman knew what he was talking about. He has lived on these waters and knows just what kind of surprises are about. I know a little of what can be stirred up."

"Stirred, eh? . . . Ah! perhaps—but what in particular?"

"Reefs. Shoals . . . devil fish. Krakatoa grew in a night from a small island to one nearly three thousand feet above sea level. . . . In one night St Lorenzo rose and made a breakwater to Callao Bay. . . . Surely these are indications of what may happen?"

"But you don't wish to risk the Strait without wind for that reason?"

"No—but because I have been the other way and didn't like what I saw."

". . . Hum! Yes, that's another matter." He turned to the second officer. "What is your view, Mr Elgar?"

"I agree with the Chief, sir."

"Um—and if we have no wind?"

"Then, sir, we shan't reach the Strait."

"Quite so. Er—I agree entirely." He bent over the chart measuring distances, then said: "We stand on to-night as we go. If the wind freshens call me at once. If it fails we go by Timor Laut. That's decided," his eyes flickering as he said it.

Upon that they left the table and took up glasses the steward had set out, filled and stood bowing one to the other over the skipper's toast:

"A fair wind to-morrow, and plenty of it—if it's God's will."

Thus they separated.

At midnight when the Chief came on deck the outlook was of the worst. Wind played with the sails, filled them, let them slat; the wheel kicked. These facts were plain. He turned to question: "When did it fail?"

"Ten o'clock or thereabouts, sir."

"The old man know?"

"Yes, I reported at eight bells. He's in his chair aft there in the draught of the mizzen. We are heading for Banda Sea, sir."

"So I gathered."

"Course E.N.E., sir. No land in sight. Light on the port bow. Watch all present."

"Very good. Relieve the wheel and look out."

Grey took his glasses to examine the light. He was now in charge, angry at the alteration of their course, the skipper sweating in his chair, uneasy now he had ordered it. Before one bell he came to join the Chief. "Can't sleep, Grey. I'm in a bath," he declaimed. "If I went below it would be worse . . . No wind at all, is there?"

"Very little, sir."

"Just what I expected at eight bells, you remember?" again the skipper led. "It's no use trying for Lombok with this kind of breeze. Er—when was it you were through by the East?"

"The voyage I was Second of *Assaye*, sir."

"Hum! What brought you down there?"

"Actually I think it was an experiment. It was the end of May when we left Hong-Kong and the monsoon nearly done. Cap'n Sharpe had a notion we should find more wind east of the Philippines—and so we did, but it was nearly six weeks before we got clear and caught the south-east trades west of Browse Island."

"Umph! Then he wouldn't try that again," Williams grunted. "Api, though—you passed it, I suppose?"

"After a fashion."

"In eruption, I suppose?"

"Smoke cap by day, sir; flame at night. We had it in sight for more than a week. No difficulty about fixing our position each day."

Williams champing with flexible jaw supposed not and suddenly faced more where the light lay—saying: "Why, it's a flare!" At the same moment lookout struck one bell and sang his report: "Light bigger on port bow."

The two in command used their glasses. "That's no steamer light," Williams declaimed. "Might be a ship on fire, or the bush."

"Looks more like Api," the Chief tossed back. "It's a flare!"

"Rubbish!" came gruffly as the skipper moved aft to get a bearing, took it and returned to where the Chief stood using his glasses. Standing there, straddle-legged, his binoculars in use, he added in tones they all knew and hated: "I think there is no occasion for flippancy, Chief. We are hundreds of miles from Api, as you know; then, why suggest . . . things which are impossible?"

"I meant what I said, sir. It looks like Api. I didn't suggest we could see Api."

"Quite so. I understand perfectly. You sought to air your knowledge. Can't forget you were Cap'n till I came. Let her go off two points and get a time bearing. . . ."

Grey acknowledged the order and the tone. In his mind he knew they would not have to wait long for confirmation. As for the implication involved, he refused to touch it. It was childish.

Meanwhile Williams, on the defensive once more, went down the companion and entered his cabin—to

pray or take courage. Either was possible, as they had seen, and in the silence of that hour Grey felt the burden of his responsibility as never before. It was not for nothing he had been through these waters and "down under," as he called it; yet, in spite of his knowledge, the skipper would come up armed with a few facts gleaned from Findlay or his talk with the Almighty, and decide what they must do. Well—that was a skipper's prerogative. Grey and all those under him were there to obey orders even if by those orders they wrecked the ship. That is the law.

Matters fell very much as the Chief had anticipated. The old man came up, stood looking over the scuttle at this indiscretion of the sea, crossed and joined his first officer, mild as though nothing had occurred.

"It's absurd, Chief—absolutely absurd and incredible. Why, there's anything between six and eight hundred fathoms all the way between us and the Paternosters," he reeled off.

"Along the coasts of Bali, Lombok and Sumbawa, yes," Grey interjected, "but not between the Kangean Group and Paternosters. Three to four hundred is the outside."

"All right—I'm not going to quarrel over a matter of three or four hundred fathoms. We've left the shoals behind and the water runs deep all along here till it touches nearly three thousand fathoms by your singular Api . . . It's no use pretending I don't see what you're after. Damn it all," irascibility mastered him for a moment and he stuttered. "Take a mean of the depth hereabouts . . . seven hundred fathoms; four thousand t-t-two hundred feet! Why, it would take a cone nearly as high as Snowdon to reach the surface.

Impossible for fire to shoot up through that. There must be some other cause—perhaps electricity.”

“It may be, of course. Anyhow, it’s hot, and I can’t forget what Krakatoa was long ago.”

“Um!” the skipper interjected, “centre of a group of islands, wasn’t he?”

“Exactly. And his cone had risen after an eruption some two thousand six hundred feet—in all about five miles from the bottom of the sea.”

“But Krakatoa was a volcano—this,” he stared sidelong at the flame, “isn’t. No sign of a cone anywhere, is there?”

“No. But if Krakatoa can climb a mile and a half in a few hours what is to prevent some other sunken peak growing? . . . There was enough force expended the other night to pull a dozen peaks through—then why . . .?”

“I know. Think I’m blind? No one disputes that! I want merely to point out that if we can’t trust our charts here we might j-j-just as well have worried through Sunda—man-o’-war or no man-o’-war. She couldn’t have sunk us—this may . . .”

He came so near in the heat of this argument Grey had no hesitation in deciding what kind of courage his skipper had taken when below. He said with intent to bring the matter to an issue: “What is the use of talking like that?”

“What—what?”

“Dampier, Cook and the rest had to build their charts as they went along,” Grey pointed out, calm in spite of his longing.

“All very well. But they had unlimited time . . . unlimited.”

"I don't know that we are being driven very hard just now, sir . . ."

"Not driven! Eh! Not driven—give me patience, O God! The sort of thing you like to think about when on watch, I suppose, like other folk in these days when prayers are at a discount and God's laws ridiculed. . . ."

Then with a swift recurve as noise increased far off: "Why—when I was mate the only thing I thought about was how to g-g-get command an' all night in! Haven't got it . . . though . . ." His voice fell into a squeal. "Eh—w-what's happening now . . . what . . . what?"

He stood with dropped jaw, light on his face, on the Chief's face, on binnacle and rail and wheel; flickering, unstable light.

It came from that small flame which had lifted its will-o'-the-wisp finger in the dance, tripped a stave and now swept the floor. A column rose where just now had been a gleam. And the night, placid and ethereal, looked down on this geyser which was born, and on two navigators disputating, tempers on edge.

Williams made a dash for the binnacle, took a bearing and stood back to snarl: "See what you make of it, Mister."

The Chief complied. "East," he said. "The same flame grown . . ."

"That's as may be," came in reply, while Williams stamped up and down, the cloak of religion slipping from him, uncertain whether to pray or to snarl further.

The column meanwhile continued to rise and spread

like a fungus. High up lateral flames shot through and something fell in a splendid curve, like the sparks thrown off by a Roman candle.

"That is not a hundred miles distant," the Captain asserted, the snarl dead before this evidence of a new peril.

"No, sir. Probably ten or twelve."

"So near? You think that?—er—are we moving at all?"

Grey tossed a line overboard which trailed, leaving a track of bubbles. He looked up presently, saying: "About a knot, sir."

"Huh! So!" He walked heavily to and fro, his eyes on the flame, then turned to the helmsman. "Port four points . . . Port a lot! Keep her away, south! South—you hear?"

"South it is, sir."

Gentle undulations of sails towering flat and shining high aloft crept into the stillness, like the flutter of wings as *Kow-Loon* acknowledged her lord.

The mate made haste to trim them.

For half an hour all hands remained fascinated by the activities of this flame as it waxed and waned. Sometimes a gush of sparks rose in what appeared to be smoke, but no explosion followed to warrant the supposition. It was the silence that made it so incredibly weird; their immunity from suffering a consequence.

Then, without a word of explanation, Grey got a bucket from the rack and prepared to lower it overside. Williams with eyes following every move came near and inquired what he was going to do.

"Get a sample of the water, sir."

With a startled glance the skipper acquiesced: "Go ahead! I know nothing of this kind of thing. My faith compels me to believe that if God Almighty means me to be buried alive by an earthquake or grilled in a spirit of flame rising out of the sea, then nothing I can do will avail me."

For this Grey had no argument ready. Predestination! (He summed it up so.) The action of an implacable yet loving God who, having created mankind took care that he should perish, willy-nilly, at the allotted moment in order to assert His Godhead! Grey had no use for such talk. He ran down to his cabin, bid Raffles keep handy and returned bringing the bucket to the ship's rail. Williams followed him, dog-like in his extremity, and saw Raffles whose duty it was to strike the bell, standing near and all agog as we say.

"Here!" the Captain called to interrupt this. "Run down to my cabin an' never mind the—the fireworks. There's a box of cheroots on my table, bring it up with some matches."

When he was out of hearing the skipper added an explanatory sentence—as though it were essential. "It's no use letting the men know what we suspect. There's talk enough already. What are you after?"

"Temperature, sir."

"But . . . oh! Well, go ahead. Got a thermometer?"

"Yes."

"And if it is hot—what then? We can't move."

"No, sir—but there are the boats," Grey answered and went ahead with his test.

The Captain moodily watched. "Boats. Good God!" the notion flashed.

Ten minutes later the Chief stood with the thermometer in hand. The flame provided sufficient light, yet he made no report. Words seemed to have failed him.

"Well?" the skipper prodded. "What do you make of it?"

"Ninety-two degrees, sir . . ."

"Rubbish!" Again the genial comment of one on edge. "Some mistake, surely. Let *me* see."

Grey handed it over.

"Um! You're right." Williams' eyes were on the flame. "Good God! Then it can't be ten miles off . . . perhaps not five?"

"Probably less . . ."

"But there was no explosion and there's no sound now . . ."

"It may have happened down under sea. There's no law but the law of force, in these matters—centripetal and centrifugal. A weak spot and we're in the soup. You see this Pacific basin is the section that was sucked out long ago, when the world was more or less gaseous, to form the moon and . . ."

Williams stood so plainly annoyed at this enigma of a Chief who was "awfully interested in this kind of thing," that Grey paused. His commander's comment ran unchecked: "D-d-damned if you aren't uncanny," he said. "You ought to be an astronomer, or one of those asses who sit in a hut on the crater of Vesuvius to register things for other fools to talk about . . . where's that brother of yours? I want a smoke . . . Can't think. No wind. Can't get out and push

vessel like this. All to hell everywhere . . . while you talk of centrifugal impossibilities that make big sound but mean nothing . . . abso-lu-tely to me. Send him! Send someone to get that box of cheroots off cabin table—or—damned if I don't go down to fetch 'em meself . . .”

Raffles appeared at the head of the ladder and Williams danced to meet him, snatched the box, saying: “Thought you were away with the lot. Here, have one yourself,” he snatched several in his haste. “P'raps last chance you'll get—see?” He was rolling one beside his ear. “First rate,” then, fumbling with a match, he lighted and crossing to where Grey stood watching: “Help yourself, Grey. Pass the box, boy! Don't know that it will clear your head, but may dim some of your notions. What does it matter? ‘All these are the beginning of sorrows,’ Chief, but we must go through with them.” He spoke under his breath his eyes sidelong on the flame. “Let him which is on the house-top not come down to take anything out of his house. Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes!” He struck again a match and with trembling fingers lighted: Grey, silent still, followed suit, thoughts teeming.

“Now,” said the Captain, “tell me what you make of it—and we—we will consider it,” he added, his back to the flame as he leaned against the rail. “How far is it?”

The Chief decided to take him on his own ground. “Of course,” he said, “it must be sheer guesswork in this case, for we can't get our distance while it remains calm. I should say four or five miles at the outside.

If we test again in half an hour it will have had time to warm up, and we . . .”

“To warm up? Good God!” Again the irascible expression in face and voice. “Surely you don’t think it may get hotter?”

“It will be boiling close to,” Grey answered quietly.

“The sea will?”

“To a certain depth. Not a doubt of it. I’ll bet it was round Krakatoa the other night.”

The skipper waved his cigar and blew a cloud. “Go on,” he urged, his voice shrill, “these are the beginning of sorrows! I’ve never been in touch with it—and we may *drive* into it . . . Well, what about the Api affair? Was it hot, then?”

“Hot enough to scorch our sails, sir, at three miles . . . but then Api was throwing up pumice and ashes that fell near enough to be unpleasant.”

“Any wind?”

“Luckily for us—yes. So we were able to keep clear. No—I didn’t like what I saw of it. None of us did. Yet it was wonderful, and if you come to think of what was going on down under——” Grey continued, astride his hobby with this encouragement, when the skipper intervened:

“Won’t do that. No use. Facts, Grey, are good enough for me. What happened?”

“We drew off, and were jolly glad to get out of it.”

“I’ll bet you were. . . . But this seems to be horse of ’nother colour,” he stuttered, his teeth castanetting. “It’s not an eruption, it’s a flame spout. Nothing flying about to-night—just fire . . . fire! It looks . . . it looks as if we’ll . . .”

His voice failed. Something was happening behind him, out there where the flame leaped. He turned swiftly to face it—the something already menacing.

It came with a hissing note as once before, hissing which rapidly increased in volume. Far abeam the water seethed—a white track. “Ha!” He remembered. “Fish . . . Ba! Ba! black sheep! And the sea shall give up its dead, Chief . . . but not yet! Not yet! . . . Look!”

Grey was divided in his allegiance. He desired to calculate the angle of that approaching line, that terrible *sauve qui peut*, and at the same time his commander. The dual feat was impossible. He faced the sea, watching the flight of thousands all passing the ship obliquely, a long line of foam marking their course. A line that seethed and twisted, throwing up spray and cressets of foam like the track of the rapids below Niagara.

The skipper, grim, bunched, his eyes sunken, crouched near the rail, his silhouette dark against the sky. He waved an arm. Then, quite suddenly, the line swerved and Grey saw that some part of it would strike the ship. He called to the crew lining the main rail: “Aft here! Up aloft some of you! Smart’s the word!” and heard from Williams standing beside him clamant now, shouting it out:

“But there are two flares, Chief! Just now one . . . presently three, four, five an’ up she rises!” He sang it chantwise while Grey watched certain he would spring. He caught sight of the fleeing fish and his voice tailed off. A foam line was at the ship’s side. Thuds struck her. Snake-like forms fell from her rail and sprawled about the decks. Great shocks struck deep

down and from the main deck came the rattle of drumsticks played on wood. . . .

"Are you ready to die, O mine Enemy!" the skipper hissed, approaching Grey. "You, who would be first shall be last, from Carimata Strait until now you have striven!" He bawled the words, his eyes wild, and suddenly seemed to lose the thread. "There shall be two in the field . . . the one shall be taken and the other left—left . . . Which of us twain—you or me? Fish!" he spat out, angry, "they, too, will be there." He came close and seemed about to offer violence, yet held back to shout: "The last day, Chief—and what have ye done to be saved? Prepare while yet there is time. On your knees, man. God knows your heart is hot with revenge . . . yet if you approach the Throne God will have mercy . . . Not in arguments . . . as a little child—confessing, confessing all that is in your heart . . . 'Kiss the Son lest he be angry and ye perish from the way . . .'"

The fire seemed to die out of him. He stood there gazing now at the flame, now at Grey. He had for a moment or so the attitude of one who was safe, at others the dread of a man bent by impending punishment.

"Steady, Captain!" Grey urged, wrung though he was. "It's passing. . . . The man at the wheel, sir! It's imperative to . . ."

"Damn the man at the wheel—what has he to do with the Judgment?"

"Nothing if he keeps his head. . . . Steady, sir, for God's sake. Come below, let me help you down. You can pray there—it will steady you . . . come!"

He moved close and took the man's arm, leading him

chattering towards the companion. He seemed to acquiesce, mincing along with quick, short steps, as though the deck were hot, till he reached the stairs—then, swiftly, savagely, he shook off the Chief's hand and struck out.

"Go below, eh? Prisoner! Locked in the cabin. Safe, while you crow an' carry on experiments with the devil! See you damned first." A blow fell, but the man lacked direction and it reached the scuttle. He drew back his hand, chattering with rage and pain, and in a moment the two were at grips, Grey striving to capture and hold his arms, Williams with tooth and nail struggling to reach his throat.

The noise they made roused the helmsman from a contemplation of the flame and brought him into the companion. "Quick!" the Chief shouted. "Hold him!" and instantly all three disappeared headlong down the stairs. Unbroken, though. Still struggling—the skipper endowed with the strength of three.

His triumph was short lived. Elgar and Cobham, both intent on the flames, heard the crash and rushed up the alleyway immediately to begin the work of sorting out. Grey from somewhere underneath shouted directions.

"Get hold of his arms! Yes—skipper! He's mad . . . hold him, Charlie! Quick! Lift up . . . damnation seize you! Twist the beast's arm!" He squirmed on his back unable to move and striving to screen his face—while in the dim light of that narrow passage the others slowly secured their prisoner.

The Chief emerged panting, his face bloody, one hand torn, and sat down to recover breath. A crowd surged about streaming in from the Afterguard's

quarters, hailing, asking questions. They came so close Elgar called for space :

“Stand back ! Give air. Open the scuttles there someone.”

“Got him ? ” Grey called.

“Sure.”

They were sitting on him as men do on the head of a fallen horse. He raved without pause, prophecy and curses mingled.

“Irons ! ” Grey ordered. “Call Raffles. They are in my cabin . . . That decides it ! I’m in command, Elgar, all hands—understand ? Take him and lock him in his cabin. One hand remain on guard. Two-hour spells. . . . Help me up, someone.”

And so at length Grey took charge.

CHAPTER IX

OUT BOATS!

FROM the open skylight came the wail of an unending prayer, interspersed with cries, sad—like the call of a muezzin from a minaret high overhead.

The two officers standing near the companion took no heed. They were engaged examining with their glasses the second of those two flames as Grey came up the stairs to rejoin them. The men were grouped about the rail speculating on the same objects, the skipper and his tantrums forgotten.

"It's nearer," Elgar announced.

"And it's nothing like the big chap," Cobham put in. "It looks like a ship on fire."

"It is," Elgar answered. "I can make out her masts . . . better let the Chief know."

Grey came near. He was limping, his face ornamented with sticking-plaster. He stood a moment with glasses focussed, and without taking them down, said: "As I guessed when that ass began to blither. She's alight from stem to stern. Looks like a boating job for some of us. . . ." He maintained his pose with lifted glasses. "She's three or four miles off and there's not enough wind to lift the tail of our dog-vane . . ."

"I suppose they will have boats, sir," Cobham suggested.

"Unless they're burnt—yes. We must send and see. . . ."

"What of the old man?" Elgar asked, "and are you fit to be up?"

"Oh, I'm all right—a bit shaky. The old man's at his prayers."

He began to limp up and down, searching the night for signs of a breeze. "None!" He snapped the word. "Get the men aft and clear away the boats. Take charge, Elgar, and send along to hurry up coffee. We'll make it coffee-royal and drink to peace. Leave Raffles with me and get to work smart. . . ."

Nothing further was said. The two officers sprang away, a new zest in life now they were free. They were boys to all intents, boys ready to carry on till the heavens fell. In sober truth the Captain's exit pleased everyone. His prayers and psalm singing had struck a wrong note. He had posed as one in direct communion with the Almighty. Sailors resent that attitude and know the danger at sea of "praying for guidance" when swift orders are essential.

Raffles, dark-eyed, lissom, *ætat* sixteen, came tumbling up the ladder and halted before his brother, his hand lifted in salute, to say he was jolly glad.

"Down to the signal locker and bring up a couple of blue lights," was the order he received and again was gone. Grey waited, resting on one foot, smiling a little grimly for one so young at the new alacrity. "They all seem as fed up with the old man as I was," he thought, then, as his brother came back at the double, said:

"Put one down on the skylight—and light the other. I want that vessel to understand we see them—that's all."

Raffles obeyed and presently the signal flared up, tinging the ship and her crew with the peculiar glow of magnesium. High up it sketched *Kow-Loon's* flat sails lined and criss-crossed by shadows thrown from rigging and masts; the men at work on the skids

unlacing boat-covers, others clearing the davits—all in strong light against the purple night.

But Grey was not thinking of these matters. He leaned against the rail near the rigging considering certain aspects of the skipper's attack; the man's malevolence, his singular malevolence. Phrases came back, as he waited there the light dazzling him—"Are you ready to die, O mine enemy?"

The beast meant that, but why? Again: "You who would be first shall be last!" "Which of us twain—you or me?" True, they all had a biblical twist . . . but they were directed at Grey, at the man who stood beside him, whom he twitted with a desire for "revenge."

Revenge for what? Because of his supersession? Nonsense! Even Williams must understand that was absurd . . . and then he remembered how when they closed, the man's aim was to get fingers about his throat. Long fingers protruding from a singularly short palm—simian! He meant that too. Strangulation would have followed if Grey by any chance had failed.

He shrugged as he stood there in the flare of magnesium which Raffles had kindled. Shrugged to push away the sensation which grew as he analysed what had happened. Beastly! A garrotter trick of semi-strangulation for which his fingers were eminently adapted.

Was that the aim of this man who was so glib in denunciation—"Are you ready to die, O mine enemy!"—or was it simply a phase of madness?

Ah! the light began to fail. The unearthly

radiance died in a splutter and he crossed to his brother, saying: "Where were you last night between five and six bells in the first watch?"

"Under the break of the poop, sir."

"Asleep?"

Raffles hesitated. He was uncertain whether to treat his brother as his brother, or as his Chief. At length he said: "I think so, sir . . . you see we were . . ."

"Lucky, Billee!" came in comment.

"Why, sir?"

"Oh, well—you could sleep. I wondered where you were, you see . . . Oh! that's all right. It's calashee watch and you were off duty . . . but you did right to admit you were asleep. I wasn't. That's where the luck came in for you. . . ."

Raffles could make neither head nor tail of this, and in spite of the diminutive used, he was still uncertain whether to continue officially. But his brother gave him no help. He seemed to be sunk in thought, staring out upon the sea; listening—as on that night when Raffles came to look for the music and found him in the after cabin. . . .

Grey put an end to this presently. He took his brother's arm and commenced to walk across and across the fore end of the poop.

"I've had a devil of a time lately," he explained, "and I've rather neglected you. Mums wouldn't like that. I hope she doesn't know. So if I'm glum you must come and wake me up. That ass got on my nerves. Didn't know I had any till I came in contact with him—I don't know what to make of him. Wake me up. Turn on the music in the dog watch. I'll

keep the old man on deck. So don't stop your playing—Mums would hate that, especially since I promised to keep you at it . . .

"Shows how little we can guess what is going to happen when we start a voyage—or, anything else for that matter. Who would have guessed poor old Downes would peg out, and lead up to this, when we left? No one. It isn't in reason that we should . . . and if we could we should all go dotty when we came up against things like that." He indicated the flame. "Yet there is something at the back of it all—something ugly." He was silent a minute, his eyes on his brother's face as they strolled to and fro. "I suppose," he said presently, "you haven't heard that playing since, have you?"

"What we heard in Hong-Kong, Harold?"

"Yes."

"No—never."

Grey went off at a tangent: "I don't know what to make of that man," he said and paused.

"Which man, Harold?"

"The skipper."

"Oh—him!" Raffles tossed back. "He's dotty."

"More or less undoubtedly—but between ourselves, Billee, there seems to be method in his madness—and . . . er . . . he was in the *Sorisba*."

"When we were?"

"He says not—but I don't believe him. I can't explain why. It's too indefinite. I don't understand why I can't believe him. It's a maze." He remained silent a while, then said: "Well, I want you to keep out of his sight as much as possible. Don't ask why, but do it—you understand?"

"Yes."

"So you have never heard the music since?"

"Never once."

"Good!" Grey breathed, "that settles it, anyway."

Raffles was uncertain what it settled; but his brother's voice invited no comment. It said he was satisfied, and if this were so Raffles had no fear. He said as he clung to his arm: "I'm glad you are Captain again, though, so are all hands. Chips and Sails got quite friendly when they heard. It will be easier now, they say."

"For them, perhaps. I don't know. It may be harder . . . but not a word about the music, old chap—what we heard, you remember. That must be between us two. No one else. Now go down and ask Mr Elgar if he will give the carpenter orders to plug the scuppers and send a couple of hands to the head pump. Tell him to flood the decks and wet everything within reach of the hose."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Grey resumed his study of the two flames. The greater showed no sign of abating. It flared as before—a column of fire that threw out coruscations high in the darkness. The ship burned steadily, helpless as the men who manned her. *Kow-Loon* ambled not far off, water playing about her decks to screen her from the fire and keep men cool. Then came word in Elgar's voice from high on the skids: "All ready port, sir!"

"Right. Lower away and push off. Fire a rocket if you want more help. . . ."

"All ready starboard, sir!" Cobham reported.

"Hold on, Mr Cobham, and let the crew stand by."

Elgar's boat was away, six oars forming pools of phosphorescent light with each stroke.

Dawn peeped over the rim of their world, a chrome mistiness before which the stars paled and the flames acquired a new tinge. Smoke lay over the ship in sombre clouds; over the spout in convoluted folds—while the sun, when it appeared, stood out like a crimson shield seen over the Essex Marshes when the wind is easterly.

A still morning, the sea like a mirror, coppery all down the pathway to the sun. Patches of dead fish, an hour ago mere blobs of light, now oscillated plainly amidst the gold. Far off, too, but steadily drawing near were three boats—one of them, please God, their own, so the men prayed, anxious, offering bets which no one took.

Up there on the poop Grey was seen using his telescope. Presently he shut it with a snap which decided all those who watched. "Ours there for sure!" A buzz of talk arose, then Raffles came down the poop ladder two steps at a stride and raced towards the galley.

"Is ours there?" reached him as he ran.

"Yes! I'm going to give orders for grub."

Cheers rang out. No doubt remained.

Boats on the one hand, a ship wrapped in flame on the other. That was the picture which dawn tinted and obscured with impartial brushes.

The men lining the rail knew definitely which of the twain engrossed them. Boats? Well—at all seasons and in all ports boats come and go; but a burning ship

is one of those rare events that capture the imagination and hold men breathless. What was her name? Was she a barque or a ship—English, Dutch? Where did she hail from? Were her hands safe?

The questions trailed away in argument; bets—personal affairs—only to be settled by the boats when they arrived.

In the growing light it was seen that the two vessels were much nearer than anyone had supposed. It was seen, too, that the doomed ship lurched more than the state of the sea warranted, that the one mast still standing “lolluped,” as they expressed it, “from side to side,” and those wise in disaster spoke of the fraction of time they gave her before the end came.

She was like a toy ship on a toy stage, burning for the amusement of children who applauded each scene. Incidents acquired a new and intense importance. Sparks, for instance, flying upward in a shower, while the glare, low down, for a moment became full of menace, meant that the mast had attained more freedom. Like a giant poker it was stirring amidst charred timbers and raising a smother; perhaps poking its way through the ship’s bottom to find an exit. . . . Then, as the men decided it had found this impossible, quite suddenly it fell sidelong upon the break of the poop without sound.

That astonished the crew. It seemed shocking that so great a spar should collapse crookedly without trumpeting or any of the fanfare of majesty: yet there it lay amidst the crushed deck and rails, buckets and skylight of the poop, prone amidst the beams and timbers of a giant brazier behind which grinned the flame which had compassed its fall.

A new uneasiness became visible to those who watched.

"She's going!" a voice proclaimed, awed beyond recognition.

"Lord send they're all out of her," another prayed, oblivious that the boats drew near.

"Whisht! See that?" a third.

These men were not hers. They did not know her name; but she appealed and they mourned over her.

She was tilting by the stern, slowly slipping back into the sea which for years she had mastered. Sparks and flame leaped about her, the sea, flame-lit, lapped at her bends seeking an entrance. Triumphant it lifted small cressets of flame and flung them broadcast upon the waters. Sea and fire! Sea and fire! it shouted to the world of men and ships; always the sea wins. The heavens caught the glare as long tongues of flame shot out, like arms extended to the gods who slept, high in that glowing vault, who saw not, neither would they hear.

A felon blow had struck the ship. Six hours ago she sailed on seas which carried her image in their arms, seas whence all but the frailest zephyrs had escaped. Stars lay over her, blinking, inscrutable, without menace or suggestion. The watch moved about noting the compass, the sails, the heat, the silence. Perhaps one joked, another spoke of love—then in a moment fire fell upon them and some who had joked or talked of love spoke no more. . . .

Still she tilted, slipping slowly, without sound. In an attitude of pain she sought rest from all these smashings which had crushed her, and now had given her the *coup de grâce*. She bowed to it, lifting slowly

her bows and the sea closed over her, soundless—a picture . . . a scene set within the flies of a stage which is the world.

The men of *Kow-Loon*, unkempt, unlettered, watched her go—deep calling to deep.

CHAPTER X

GREY'S HANDICAP

A GROUP of chattering Malay and Chinese sailors squatted about the *Kow-Loon's* quarter-deck, explaining in the barbarous colloquialism known as Pidgin-English the why and the wherefore of this punishment which had befallen them.

They had climbed in succession over the rail with the mutual and inspiring salutation "Hallo, John!" and had subsided at once, some on their heels, some on their buttocks to "speekee tlué one time an' no makee lie." Coffee, tea, biscuits and other comestibles kept them loquacious if not altogether lucid. A picturesque, unemotional group for the sun to light and warm. Some were clad in sarong and the skimped jacket of all Malays—others with little in front and less behind; folk caught while asleep, yet well-favoured, moist and showing hardly any signs of the ordeal they had escaped.

On the poop beneath an awning the ship's "doctors" were at work, the geyser forgotten. Grey leaned against a capstan resting his leg, alternately supervising and turning to speak to two who required no aid. He seemed perplexed for the first time since leaving Hong-Kong; the cause of it a young girl and her rather silent father who had arrived in the boats with the Malays and those who were being treated for burns.

The skipper and second mate were the two most serious cases—the former a bandit-like figure clad in the usual white suit, but grimed beyond words. He sat erect because the blob of flame that caught him had flayed his neck and shoulders. About his waist was

a soiled cummerbund, on his head a tilted topee. He was short and spare, a Scot who had lost his hair, beard, eyebrows and showed a face blistered but not by the sun. Him they had doctored and he waited sweating, oil and grease trickling down.

The second mate, a Dutchman, was still in the hands of the surgeons. He was swathed in wadding and looked like the bust of a snow man whose pipe had been stolen. For days, Elgar explained, he must not touch tobacco. His lips and chin were raw, so were his neck and arms, for he had intercepted a "blob" of flame in the same way and of the same quality as that stopped by his skipper.

The Dutchman smiled grimly over Elgar's advice.

"I know, I know," he said. "An' wot I not know I 'ear you say. Still—wizout tobac for a week is not possible. I lige even now a cheroot, no?"

"Sorry—I can't allow it."

"So? Zat is sād."

"Captain's orders," Grey smiled to help him. "Can't kick at it."

"So?"

"Steady, Haarlen," the skipper intervened. "There's no appeal." Then keeping his shoulders very straight he added: "Eigh! but this is bonny after yon," and for a moment kept silent. He seemed content now that he was bound and oiled, to contemplate *Kow-Loon's* trim poop, the brass work and all the insignia of her former status—then with a twist towards Grey he said: "She'll be country-built,* I'm thinking?"

"Moulmein," came the answer. "1835."

* Built in the East.

"Aye—an' hard as nails . . . John Company, too—it's in her bones."

"Unmistakably"

"They built ships in those days, Cap'n," the swathed figure decided. Then, with a twist: "You'll *be* her Cap'n?"

"Yes. I suppose so."

Again, his face very set, the skipper said: "You're o'er young, I'm thinkin', f'r this sort of game."

"Just so. That's where the trouble comes in—yet I shall make shift to take her home. In fact I've had promotion again since we left Hong-Kong."

"So—Cap'n dead?"

"No—mad. Listen!"

The drone of his prayers came from the skylight as they did so. "I had to put him in irons," Grey added.

"And he fought. Ave! I saw there had been mair than one sort o' trouble to ye when I climbed your rail—but him—ye canna *keep* him ironed."

"Why not?"

"Because," said the Scot, "the Board o' Trade wull be after ye if ye do—an' others."

"Nonsense! He's mad. It wouldn't be safe to loose him."

"I'm speaking for your good, young sir—an' not because I would hamper ye. It's like this wi' the law of it—If he's obstreperous an' a danger to the *ship*, ye can iron him; if he's no, if he's quiet an' just mazed ye'll hae to gie him his freedom. It's the law . . . an' likely ye've those on board wha know it."

"Yes—that's possible," Grey tossed back, satiric, blue eyes flashing. "One of my *pandit* friends used to say the law has as many ways of flaying you as the

Buddhist Priest with his "*Om! Mani padme, hum*" if you believe either in him or it . . . but the master in question was a Mohammedan who had suffered at the hands of a baboo lawyer."

"An' that," said the Scot with a smile he dared not broaden, "accounts for the milk in his coco-nut."

"A bias, surely," the new passenger protested, then, turning to Grey, he added: "I suppose this question of the mad skipper is the reason you prefer not to be burdened by our presence?"

"Undoubtedly. You see how I am fixed. The ship has been knocked about, we are short handed and there's this danger . . ."

"Meanwhile we are here and thankful to be so," said the man.

"We are all here, thank God," the girl joined, her eyes lifted to Grey's, "and in spite of the mad skipper I wish to say, *j'y suis, j'y reste*, if you don't mind. So please be kind and permit it."

"My dear," her father interjected, "Green's never refuse those who grin when they are kicked."

Grey looked across with a half-smile which the girl caught. He saw a slim figure of unmistakable youth, with humorous dark eyes, saw she was clad in a loose fitting frock which might have been a peignoir, and beside her the man whom someone had said was her father. He was bronzed, wore a cork helmet, a close-cut beard and Grey decided he might be a naval officer—a man with a strong face, deep-set eyes and slightly aquiline features—smoking a cheroot with evident enjoyment.

Together they made a striking pair, impossible to associate with a wrecked coasting brig or Macassar—

which Grey imagined to be the Edge of Beyond. The Scottish skipper had made some sort of introduction as they climbed on board; he may have mentioned their names, but Grey had no recollection of it. At the moment he was concerned to remember he had practically refused to permit them to remain as passengers in *Kow-Loon*. So he said: "Well, well! We must consider that presently. I felt it due to you to explain why I hesitated." He turned to the skipper and asked how it happened that he and the second mate were the main sufferers.

"I was below, Cap'n Grey, an' my second mate was below. The mate, the man at the wheel and my Chinese cook were on deck—an' they're likely there to this minute, eh, Haarlen?"

"Zey was joust caught an' roasted," the Dutchman chimed in, "zey was caught an' roasted wiz-out zey could move or shout . . . I hear ze noise it all make an' yump out of my bed quick to see wot come to us. Almighty! I get my head out an' I get back quick. I get back quick . . . but I get what you see while I poke mine 'ead out of ze scuttle. Ze mate an' man on ze wheel I see joust keeckin' in a heap on deck. Zay not speak nussing before I fall down ze stair wot I climb. . . ."

"Aye," the skipper put in, "there would no be muckle time tae shoot just then. None! The flame, ye'll understand, was lickin' the maintop when I reached the cabin door an' got yon," he stiffly held forth his arms. "No time at a' . . . just liquid fire, Captain, luppin' frae rail tae rail."

He sat immovable as a puppet cannily twisting his head from side to side as he explained this. He had the

appearance of a man impressed by his own picture, marvelling at its truth. His lips moved once or twice, but his eyes gave no indication of a wish to resume. He moistened his lips with his tongue and seemed content until the Dutchman asked where the *Kow-Loon* was bound and heard Grey answer: "London, thank God!"

"London?" he hurled back, "then why are ye heading East?"

"Because Sunda Straits are blocked," Grey answered.

"Blocked!" Again the skipper intervened, his eyes first on one then the other. "What like talk is that—unless," he hesitated irascible, "unless ye mean to infair we are at war, Captain."

"No—we are not at war; but there has been an earthquake," Grey explained.

"So—where?"

"Somewhere in the Straits. We were west of Thousand Islands."

"Ursequake!" the man of many bandages guffawed, sitting stiffly unmoved. "Almighty! Zen zat is what we 'ear when we are in Macassar Straits . . . My skipper sink I run ze brig ashore; but he see presently that is not so. Many explosions follow an' we suppose at last ze magazines at Batavia blow up. . . . Almighty! An' all ze time it ursequake!" He half rose in his chair to look round. "I not go Eass for myself," he concluded.

"Steady, Haarlen!" the skipper ejaculated, but without moving. "Let me understand." He faced Grey once more. "You mean you're bound through Lombok or by the Arafura Sea?"

Grey nodded assent.

"Then ta be quite plain, as I'm no hankerin' ta be nigher yon pillar o' flame, I'll hae to put my men in the boats. She belonged to Bangkok," he referred to the lost brig here, "I was on a passage fra Macassar tae Probolinggo—whaur I had the promuse of a cargo to Siam. Further, I was wantin' ta get in touch wi my owners, *then*, but now I can afford ta lose no time . . ." He seemed to prick his ear and argue, though no one spoke. "I must find out," he said, "if they've been sae . . . wowf as . . ." paused, staring at the sea, then added: "Ye see that? I take it earthquakes *are* an essential pairt o' the Act o' God? Weel! But supposin' in drawin' up yooour policy . . . ye'd forgot . . . an' it may be o'er late ta get it mendid . . . sir," he addressed Grey, "fra my point o' view, as pairt owner, ye'll see I'm hit . . . Maybe! An' it comes tae this—if the Act o' God does na apply, I'm a ruined man the day. But if it does, I'm gaein' hame P. & O. Noo ye have me."

"But you can't sit in a boat while you're in that state," Grey interjected. "It's death."

"An' may be it's death if I stay," the skipper acquiesced. "Wi all respect, we'll just feenish oor *chota hazri* an' slip away whiles it's quiet . . . for between oorsels, Captain, it's no material if the Clause does na apply, whether I die in the boat or on the beach at Saigon."

He seemed inclined to fume, but dared no relaxation of his attitude. He twisted carefully to examine the land lying far off in the sultriness and twisted back—while the geyser roared, shooting long tongues of flame at the zenith. "You mean you will take to

your boats and row to Probolinggo, Captain?" the passenger asked.

"Just that, sir. There's nae ither way."

"How far is it?"

"Roughly a hunder an' seventy miles. Wi' a breath o' fair wind we can do it in twenty-four hours."

"And to Macassar?"

"Two hun'er an' fifty, sixty miles—fra here."

The passenger made a slight gesture and turned to Grey.

"I suppose it is impossible for you to take us back?"

"Dad, I won't go to Macassar. I hate it. I shall always hate it now . . ." She stopped as suddenly as she began, and Grey saw that her eyes were dim.

"As a matter of fact, even if I had a breeze it is impossible as I have no chart of the Celebes," he said.

"Then what can you do?" she flashed up at him.

"Keep you on board, pray to God to meet a steamer so that we can place you where you can have some comfort. . . . You said you were bound to London? Well, so am I—but it is no use putting you on any boat bound Sunda way, even if we meet one—for you couldn't get through. The whole thing is a jumble . . . and all the liners from China have had orders long before this to make the passage via Singapore. Nothing will come down here until the Straits have been surveyed. You may rely on that absolutely."

After some further discussion they went aft to look at the boats which were towing, and found them waterlogged, which is the way with boats when suddenly required for service. A man was in each of them bailing, but it was quite evident they must be

left to "take up" which is the only medicine for craft made leaky by the sun. The Scot acquiesced—indeed as a seaman he could do no less in spite of his desire to get away.

As though it mocked those who worked, sunset that night was of infinite beauty, mingled with a wrath which was sublime. The flame took new tints as it climbed, became sinister, malignant; it soared to reach new heights, found coppery tints to paint the mushroom crown—until, at length when all else was dark, the pillar of flame stood fast.

They had drawn so near it lighted the ship's decks, threw shadows behind those who worked and made a mystery of the *Kow-Loon's* sails and rigging as she lay nearly idle in the breath it flung.

Then, when night had come, as though that were the hour for which serenity had endured, a vast rush, as of steam, came from the geyser. The flame blinked, became of a mixed character, water and fire, bubbling, fantastic against the sky. It climbed soaring to the stars, while swiftly everyone sought cover. On the main deck was a stampede. On the poop men vanished. Only Grey and Elgar watched from beneath a drawn cowl, aware they could do nothing.

There came after a time a low, rumbling explosion and again a burst of flame shot high, high above the mushroom crown and went out in a mist of steam, cinders and boiling mud.

The sea hissed under it. Fish flashed under it, leaped and fell apart. A streak of foam passed seething beneath the ship, her bell tolled as she lurched, and again from the tortured depths came a wave, charging

as those others had charged, toppling along, high crested, roaring, magnificently caparisoned for attack.

"Keep cover! All hands!"

Kow-Loon bent to greet it—dipped, slipped, lurched and buried her side in it . . . then lifting her square stern ports, her quarter-galleries and all the escutcheonry of a splendid age—"Oum! *Mani padme, hum*," her watchword—saw it pass.

A moment the flame towered challenging the cool rush of its enemy, tinging the crest as it moved to annihilate ship and crew and flame. . . . And in that moment came the shrill cry of one who took the poop ladder in a stride and crashed at the foot of it beating the deck with manacled hands. The flame died. Swiftly darkness touched the ship . . . thin mist came, and high up, moving to the watching stars, the diapason of the sea gradually falling asleep.

Men crept from shelter to search the new silence that was born. Voices emerged from the shadows, voices of those who had been swept away; the cry of one who lay behind a spar unable to rise.

The watch drew near and found him with a broken arm. They passed aft carrying him to the cabin and there, near its entrance, came upon the mad skipper lying stunned where the sea had flung him.

Nothing else but the water which rolled from side to side escaping . . . and the voice of one who said: "No—not dead . . . Lord! send us peace!"

CHAPTER XI

PEARLY NIGHT

THE night was quiet when soon after six bells in the first watch the castaways climbed the rail and took to their boats. A few bantering sentences passed as they pushed off; the long row sobering one crew, the singular perils of a sea which produced flame and boiling mud the other.

The Scot, made solemn by the contingencies which might arise from an imperfect appreciation of the Act of God, pronounced, nevertheless, a sort of elegy over Grey as they parted. "A mad skipper," he concluded, "is the devil's handicap on the body wha must take his place. You're quit of the flame; but of *him* . . . Weel! may the good God gie ye help!"

"Whiroo! man," was Grey's answer, "we shall make good." Yet as he spoke he remembered this madness was a new danger, one which demanded subtlety of men accustomed to the stars.

He glanced down as a voice rose from the boats and saw the Scot, his face and arms swathed, leading stiffly the cheer with which they parted. Two ships' companies were there, both of them engaged on a forlorn hope, yet without knowledge it was forlorn—happy it was so.

Grey climbed the taffrail presently and leaned out to see them go. Beside him was the girl and her father, silent both of them, as Grey himself. He looked down and saw that the awnings he had provided for the boats appeared like the flat tombstones in a cemetery upon which the moon shone—yet discovered nothing sinister in the idea. He was content to watch, to await developments. So they paddled out, one man banging

on a tom-tom, while a Malay sitting in the bows of the leader commenced to sing. His thin voice, keeping time with the drum strokes, rose and fell in strange five-tone roulades which may have been the *Dies Irae* of his people, or the specious banter of his kind. Who could say which? Not Grey, the rather stern figure who leaned there to listen.

From far off came the note of other drums—signals all of them, booming deep in the forests of nearer islands. Out there men waited astride the bamboo piles which held their huts above the creek. Women and children were crouched upon the floors with packed pots, rice and mats ready for the moment which perchance might come. For days they had waited thus. Beneath them the sea ebbed, leaving amidst the stranded filth of their village a litter of dead fish upon the sand; pumice and the dust of death upon the green of trees which stretched long fingers across the creek. The jungles behind were as dangerous to traverse as the land-locked sea which snarled, showing white fangs through the lattice work, now that the age-long feud of fire and water again was joined. Men, women, children, sailors—all of them waiting on events; waiting, hoping they might pass.

Grey recognized these factors as he turned to go below and presently came in touch with others quite as unmanageable. Across the cabin door as he stepped past, lay the steward—flung there as it presently appeared when the skipper escaped. Grey stooped to free him and kneeled to discover his hurts. Abrasions simply; an ugly bruise on his forehead—probably some concussion and in any case another patient in a centre where no clinic exists. Midnight passed before

the man responded to treatment and Grey was free to move on.

In an adjoining cabin lay the sailor whose arm he had set ; Raffles watching him. The Chief looked in to see how he fared ; saw that he was coming to laboriously and unpleasantly, while his brother looked done. He decided to sit a few minutes.

"Not much chance for talk or music, Billee, mavourneen, with all these bothers and strange folk on our hands ; but there are compensations. I couldn't have made a good job of this chap," he indicated the patient, "without the new man's assistance. It's a compound fracture. Lucky he was here."

"Is he a doctor ?"

"I know nothing yet, not even his name ; but he's a sahib all right."

"Will they come all the way with us ?"

"Not if we strike a mail boat. At the moment I don't feel I want them ; it only adds to my burden."

Raffles came near and put his arm round his brother's neck, saying : "I wish I hadn't come this trip, Harold."

"Why especially now, Billee ?" Grey asked.

"I'm not sure. I think that beastly geyser scared me. Supposing it had struck us instead of that brig . . . or the island had come up under us . . ."

"Someone been croaking, Billee—that it ?" Grey laughed, twisting so that he could read him, one arm holding him. "supposing Krakatoa had waited an hour or so—where would we be now ? Buried. Gone to join dear old Dad. . . . Tell you what, you've been too long penned up. The cabin's fuggy. I'll send Frazer or Curtis to relieve you."

"And then Mums would be by herself, Harold . . . and . . ."

"Rubbish! Run away on deck and send one of them in. I'll stay till he comes. Afterwards come to me on the poop."

"No, please, not that! I couldn't bear the other fellows to know I'm an ass."

"Right. Stick on till you're relieved."

Freak sounds reminded him as he went that the skipper prayed—confounded it seemed by the singular spryness of that cloud which "got up" as he expressed it, "and bashed him when he stepped upon it." He called it "The footsteps of the Throne," but in sober prose it was the main deck—ten feet below the level from which he stepped.

Williams was mad enough now, if one might judge by his ramblings. It seemed necessary as Grey listened to take further precautions. He must risk it. Whoever commanded *Kow-Loon* must risk it. No one was safe, the ship was not safe while the skipper remained at large—and Raffles, of whose fate he had been warned, certainly was rather done. He paused a moment considering this and passed on. Sails must start making strait-jackets to-morrow. But how cut them? All kinds of details pestered Grey. He could decide nothing now. He must think. Perhaps the new man could help him!

He stumbled over a door-coaming, hurt his toe and damned. He knew by that he was weary. How could it be otherwise—now? He knew it could not and so reached the poop. He stood there wryly acknowledging his handicap and looking to windward as sailors do.

Darkness everywhere. *Dies Iræ* sunk in it, only the drums awake. Moonless, starlit dark, light airs fanning the deck—still from the east . . . still from the east. Well, at all events that would aid those who rowed towards Probolingó! . . . Phosphorescence in blobs and swift-moving arrow-heads; *Kow-Loon's* sails fluttering high out of sight, a mystery for the night to appraise together with all those fleeing arrow-heads. . . .

Somewhere not far off there was wind—easterly as the season ordained; but thrown out of gear by the Pulse of Darkness. Not far off, too, were the Paternosters which men in bygone days had discovered maybe when telling their beads. Beyond, countless islands lying south and east of the splayed terrain known as Celebes. Beyond again, Salayer and the Bouton Passage which seemed their destiny. . . .

If the wind freshened they could make this passage and reach the more open sea south of Gilolo, Ceram and the western shores of New Guinea. After that, if it continued light, there would be more peddling around, as he put it, more fighting to avoid the shoals and pass the Tiger group, Batu Ata, Api and all the coral entanglements that lay between. The way seemed strewn with risk—interminable. It would keep Grey on the stretch even with a breeze; but as things were it might wreck him.

Two days passed without event—light airs and sultriness accompanying them. The patient progressed in spite of it; the skipper seemed dazed still by his fall on “the footsteps of the Throne.” Grey learned the names and conditions of those two

strangers who had come under his rule. So much had he been occupied that until now he had scarcely spoken a dozen words with either.

It came about in this way.

The girl was leaning back in a long chair beneath an awning spread for her comfort over the spanker-boom ; her attitude that of one who says from time to time *j'y suis, j'y reste*—nothing more explanatory. Yet the bundle of clothes she had been able to collect and bring with her was small enough to make an angel coy. It had transpired, too, that the heavy luggage of these people had gone from Macassar long since to Batavia, where it was to await them and the mail boat by which they were to travel. Doubtless it now lay beneath tons and tons of cinders, scoriæ, lava ; a statement of the case which might have come with a similar snap from the lips of the pragmatic Lieutenant of *Buitenzorg*—yet she did not weep.

Actually she was in a new world and engrossed by all she saw. She had said as much to Grey, who looked back to ask : “ But not with the mad skipper ? ” And her smile came laden so that Grey was uncertain whether she joked or stung.

“ Yes—why not ? It’s new to me, anyhow. Mentality must be interesting to most people. To my father certainly, but then he is a scientist—a very learned person. He says everybody is mad, more or less—generally more, which perhaps is the reason my mother refused to leave England and accompany him in his wanderings.”

“ But you,” Grey put in as she ceased, “ don’t believe that ? ”

“ No.”

"Why not? Isn't it possible?"

"If I had thought so, Captain Grey, I certainly would have given more consideration to that boating expedition to Probolingo."

"Why?"

"Well, you see, two mad skippers would be rather a handful in one ship—don't you think?"

Grey laughed more at the quizzical attitude of this girl than at the idea she presented. He had not laughed so for months—years!

"The trouble is that it may happen," he said, "for if things go on as they are going, I shall wake up and find there is a pair of us."

"Then Dad would have to take charge," she tossed in his face.

Grey had no words for this. It seemed to be her one attitude. Never serious. As an antidote to boredom she was worth an army of jesters—cap and bell complete. Yet Grey was turning away without speaking when she added:

"Now I have made you angry!" and a sigh escaped so that peace might continue between them.

"Really what amazes me is that you seem to think life is a joke," he complained, though his eyes smiled.

"Well—and isn't it?"

"No, I'm dam'——"

"Don't spoil it. A man who can't swear sanely on board ship must be more of a prig than a saint. . . . Besides, I'm used to it. Dad contrives it in six Languages. Some of the words sound quite funny."

"I must make his acquaintance," Grey laughed. "Please tell me his name."

"Incidentally, and mine?" she tossed up at him.
"Really, I thought Rob Roy introduced us . . ."

"Who is Rob Roy, please?"

"The splendid little man you swathed in cotton-wool, who saved us both and told you that if the Act of God did not apply he's as lief die in the boat as on the beach at Saigon; but that if it did 'he was gaein' hame P. & O.'"

Grey laughed out and so did the girl. "I was pitying you," he said, "and you didn't deserve it."

"I was pitying myself," she said, "for I couldn't laugh."

"Did you want to?"

"Yes—the oil was running down his nose, and when he said P. & O. it dropped. I had to kick the deck or . . ."

"Tragic," he admitted when he dared, "but won't you introduce yourself now?"

"Certainly I will, Captain Grey. My name is Madeline . . . which is one reason why I don't mind talking to mad folk; and my father is Dr Challoner. He is a professor really, only we never call him that unless we wish to make him angry. We came to the East to look for the missing link. But you mustn't say I said so."

"Why?"

"Because there isn't one and he believed there was."

"And you have looked for it?"

"Rather. At least Dad has. He thought he had found it once, too. In Japan. Dinky little people all covered with hair, but they weren't it."

"How could you tell?"

"Because they had a religion."

"And mustn't they?"

"Gracious! No—or it would have to be very primitive. But these people had a god and idols and a cave temple *and* priests. So it was no go. Besides, they cut their nails . . . at least they had the 'cutest' shell things, with one side like sand-paper to rub them short. I don't know how they did their toes—perhaps they got each other to do that for them—Dad could tell you—and of course a real missing link couldn't be as civilized as all that."

Raffles came near and, standing at the salute, said: "The ship is under steam, sir, and has taken in sail. She is coming ^{up} fast."

"Thank you, I will come in a moment."

As Raffles vanished the girl looked up to ask: "Who is that nice boy, please?"

"My brother—acting third officer."

"Then why does he call you sir, and salute?"

"Because he is on duty and I am his senior officer."

"How jolly! What's his name?"

"Raffles."

"Not a relation to Sir Stamford?"

"We are cousins, I believe. Please excuse me, I must go and see what I can make of this vessel?"

"May I come too? Thanks awfully. I love ships and everything connected with them."

Grey got his telescope to bear and presently decided it was their old friend the Dutch brig heading away for Macassar. She had altered her course and would not come near. Nevertheless, Grey hoisted signals hoping to attract her. "Not for our sakes, please," Miss Challoner begged. "I bar going back to Macassar

now I have a chance to reach London." They hoisted in spite of that as Grey was anxious to get news of Batavia, but the flags hung up and down—rags of bunting which no one could decipher.

There were those among the crew, too, who decided it was "that Dutchman," the *Buitenzorg* they had come across just clear of Thousand Islands . . . "who had the cheek to turn them back." But Grey could do nothing. Night was coming in, the sun even now drawing a crimson track which reached *Kow-Loon* and kept her gleaming.

They lolled nearly idle upon the glassy surface while one and another of the crew complained of *Kow-Loon's* luck, the luck of the Devil they termed it—until a tremor boiling up white took the ship in its arms and shook her, bringing all to attention. Elgar came swiftly up the ladder and stood expectant. But nothing happened. Grey waiting near the rail seemed absorbed in what he saw. Water in hundreds of fathoms beneath them still boiled in spirals from the depths. The girl and her father came up the companion and stood near Grey. They did not speak. Neither did Grey. Elgar went down to his cabin. The Challoners crossed to the break of the poop and sat beneath the awning. Grey remained. Outwardly he made no sign, but at the back of his mind—in spite of the brief relaxation of careless chat he had passed so lately—he heard the cry that came so long ago: "Dust! Dust! Dust!" he knew not why.

He remained leaning over the rail absorbed in this thought, not consciously thinking of it, nor of the cry—but, as a blind man who, having come to a strange

path, halts and waits for assistance. Was it possible a message could reach him from England, from the other side of the world, one not sent in the ordinary way, but through the air . . . no instrument, no wire, no anything he knew . . .

He crossed, took a chair facing the Doctor and put the matter to him point blank: "Could it?"

"With some individuals, certainly," Challoner answered.

"You mean if they have the right temperament?"

"It comes to that. We know very little. Research goes on, certain matters are acknowledged, but the rest is vague."

"Mind can speak to mind—that is what I mean. Nothing less. Is it feasible—Love the only motive power . . . a mother's love for her boy?"

He spoke rapidly, snatching at straws, and Challoner reading him said:

"Undoubtedly. It has happened. Verification has been obtained, unchallengeable. Personally I know very little. It is not until one dips into a matter of this kind that one recognizes how little one knows. We are all fumbling in the dark. I think it possible that some day we may be able to talk without cables or wires . . ."

"Just through the air?"

"Yes." To interrupt him and throw him off the track the ship jarred and Grey rose to stand near the rigging.

A sprawled-out splash of light attracted him as the jar died. So violent it had been it seemed *Kow-Loon* must have touched bottom, yet with his eyes on the trucks Grey saw that she continued to sway. The fires

of Milky Way still burned. Nothing new had occurred, but the sprawl had vanished. Phosphorescence, Grey decided. The sea was full of it.

Dr Challoner and Madeline came over to join him and asked at once: "What was that?"

"Sub-marine disturbance," he replied as carelessly as he could for the girl's sake.

"I thought so. I happen to have had some experience of earthquakes and earthquake countries; but this is the first time I have felt it at sea. Very interesting. Like a galvanic shock, in effect."

"Yes—and personally I hope it is our last experience. The farther we draw from the shallows the better. A breeze would help us. With Api astern and Timor in sight we may look for peace, but not before."

"True. I am in agreement there, for Timor is outside the belt of volcanoes that runs right through these islands to Japan. I must get you to permit me to look at your charts one day, Captain—but not now."

"No, please, not now, Dad. The gong's gone and I am simply starving," said Miss Challoner.

Nothing wrong with nerves there, Grey reflected as he watched them go. Well, that's something in a raffle of this sort. . . . So it *was* possible for Mums to make us hear! Not a miracle at all, he thought. Just temperament—the right kind of people! He wished to go farther but could not. He was chained to the deck, restless, and leaning over the side saw that the sprawl had returned.

Standing there, the evidence presently very strong that something lay near, or clung to the ship, Grey refused to believe it. It was the hour and the place, perhaps the disturbance that had caused it. In any

case what could he do? Watch and wait . . . wait always. Well, thank God all this miasma would vanish presently when they got a breeze. But there was no wind. The night, hot and scented in a manner he did not know, gave no promise of wind. The stars blazed like small suns throwing long tracks of light. He nodded over these details, aware there were others which he could not read.

Lookout was striking eight bells as he reached this certitude; singing his report: "Lights bright and all's well!"

Almost involuntarily Grey questioned it. How could it be well now there was no wind, Lombok barred and that strange sprawl down there which one could neither fight nor escape? Cobham stood aft near the wheel, but it was useless to consult him—he was a boy, ready to challenge the devil if need be. Elgar was more staid. He would call him when he came up. . . .

Men's feet sounded at length padding the deck as they drew near to muster. Someone called the roll; the bosun climbed to report. "Thank you, relieve the wheel and look out."

Cobham went down. Elgar was in charge.

Yet Grey asked no question. He was loth to raise it, for he alone perhaps of those on board understood what he faced—if his surmise were correct. He waited, watching alternately the sea and the sails. No wind. No movement down under. Raffles came up and spoke a few words—after that the watch droned on. Nothing stirred, nothing new—just the darkness, the gleaming stars, the click of hanks as the

stays'ls swayed ; the jerk and groan of the rudder each time the lazy swell sucked down the side.

Grey seemed to doze, he remained so still. The bell sounded, one stroke—he did not stir. Then as Elgar left the poop to go the rounds, somnolence claimed him. His head sank on his arms. Aft the main rigging a trunk-like thing rose, waving to and fro. Something slipped from Grey's fingers—his pipe ! Instantly he was alert, stooping. He picked it up, stowed it and spread wide his arms, yawning. . . . He was awake, stiffening as he had not when the tremors ran . . .

There lay the thing he had seen. It was going down, fading even as he caught sight of it . . . phantasmagoria, perchance ? It might be so—yet Grey dared not take that view.

His pose remained easy, but a cold sweat trickled down from his armpits.

Around him was the pearly night, star-spangled, moonless, the Cross and myriad fires of Milky Way. High overhead the sails like blue shutters blocking out a whole galaxy. Aft, a sailor drowsily conscious of a compass card which remained poised, immovable as it seemed for all time. Across and across the fore-end of the poop a pair of white trousers appeared walking, that the boy who wore them might keep awake and strike the bell. Watch on deck and watch below asleep—all of them with heads pillowed upon waterways, or "lined-out" beneath the fo'c'sle awning ; damp pillows beneath damp heads, damp dungarees covering damp limbs—a still sultriness the only air to breathe. . . .

Overside Grey leaned, apparently at his ease. Over-

side, nonchalant for the sake of the man at the wheel noting the "Something" that had caused him to stiffen a while since, again pulsing to the surface; lifting head or tail, or arm so high a blind man could see it.

Twisting and speaking as though he feared the Thing could hear, Grey called: "Mr Elgar!" Then, as he failed to discover him: "Raffles!" and to that marching timekeeper: "Cut away below, till I send for you. Keep in your cabin." Raffles appeared at this, climbing from the main deck. The Thing vanished as he came.

He stood beside his brother, looking up at him, white to the lips, whispering: "You called me, sir?"

"Yes—where is Mr Elgar?"

"For'ad, sir. I saw him pass."

"So! . . . Where were you?"

Raffles pointed to the main chains.

"Yes—I thought I told you—er—then you saw it, I suppose?"

"I saw something—I couldn't turn in, I had to look . . ."

"Alongside?"

"Yes, sir—and——" Raffles boggled horribly. In truth he did not know what he saw, it was so unlike anything he had imagined. His brother interrupted, brusque, harsh, as it seemed to the frightened lad.

"Think. Something sticking up, I suppose—where?"

"Abreast the quarterhatch, sir."

"Long?"

"Above the sheer pole, sir."

"Hum . . . yes. And what happened then?"

"I threw a belaying pin at it . . . I think I hit it. . . . It went down, quick as greased lightning."

The Chief switched off at a tangent: "You are sure Mr Elgar went for'ad, I suppose?"

"Positive, Harold—why?" He came close, his voice unsteady, hands raised in fear.

"Then, as far as I can see at present, dear old boy, you and I are in touch with this just as we were with the music. And . . ." He linked arms and strolled further from the man at the wheel, "it's another of those stupid things we can't discuss—even with Elgar or Cobham for it may be—imagination. I *didn't* see . . . enough to . . .

"Wait!" He halted abruptly by the rail. "Look over again. Make no noise but just tell me what you can see, now—so that . . . Oh well, so that I can be sure I haven't got the jim-jams. Now—quietly . . . anything there?"

"Something all along the side . . . something shining . . . no, not that, but like those phosphor matches make if you strike them in the dark."

"Quite. I see—not plain, eh?"

"No—like a smudge."

"Where does it begin and end?"

"Just under the mizzen chains, to—oh! a long way foreside the main rigging. Somewhere near the fore-sheet lead, I think."

"Um! Quite a lot of it, eh? Anything sticking up now by chance?"

"No . . . at least I can't see it from here . . . Why—what is it, Harold? Tell me."

"Probably one of those snakes we came across away back . . . can't say. It may be gone in an hour."

"But if it hasn't, Harold?" Raffles urged.

"In that case we'll have to try some more belaying pin, I suppose. Don't get you hair out of curl over it. . . . Something was bound to come sooner or later out of this calm. Why? Well, you can't have eruptions and earthquakes without shaking things up that live a long way down under, can you? Just consider what happens in the jungle when there's a fire?"

Raffles supposed not.

"Remember the fish we've had on deck, and the things we've passed, blown flat, big and little. They will never swim again. They've been thrown out of their hunting-grounds, boiled, gutted, flayed, and there are others," he glanced around, "that are not dead, who simply don't know where they are. They see a ship, perhaps, dallying along as we are, and take her for a rock. They come over for shelter and hang on to us. Lots of them hide behind rocks, you know, down under—just waiting for things to pass. Then there's a flash and a kill—anything there now?"

Raffles leaned out, his brother gripping one hand. "No—not now. Harold! I believe it's gone!"

With a flick of mendacity the Chief corroborated this and to the boy's joy added: "Not a doubt of it. . . . Tell you what. We want a breeze. Nothing could hang on alongside if we had wind. Cut away and send your pal back to look after the time, then turn in—er—where do you sleep?"

"Oh, anywhere about the deck, sir."

"Hum, well, take my settee for it. It's more comfortable—and between ourselves, Billee, I don't think Mums would care about your sleeping on deck

when the moon's up. They say it's bad for the eyes."

"But there is no moon, Harold."

"That's so—but there are the stars. They're just as bad in the tropics."

With this euphemism on his lips, Grey again commenced his walk. He wanted to see Elgar. There was no one else with whom he cared to share his knowledge. Failing Elgar, it must be Raffles—and he desired to spare him. He summoned the bosun and sent him on his quest then leaned against the rigging at rest.

Hot and oppressive the night remained. Grey somnolent as one may be who has been so long on duty, he is able to sleep standing. He found himself nodding, marched a dozen turns, then saw the cane lounge empty awaiting him and sat. After all, the bosun would be aft, or Elgar in a few minutes. That would suffice. He sat and in two minutes was asleep.

Soon after four bells the bo'sun drew near and decided to wake his Chief. He stood over him obviously ill at ease, saying that he couldn't find Mr Elgar—that he was "nowheers" unless maybe he was overboard or in the hold. Grey looked up scarcely comprehending what he heard. "Nonsense," the one word he uttered.

In justification the bo'sun rehearsed the search he had made—first on his own account, then "with all hands hunting high and low—and they hadn't come acrost him." He gave it as his opinion, while the Chief slowly roused, that he must be down below aft, "in the lazaret, sir—where one of them thinks he's gone to look at some cases as have worked loose. . . ."

"Odd time to choose, bo'sun, isn't it?" Grey questioned, twisting round and sitting up.

"Can't think of nowhere else, sir. He's not on deck."

"But the lazarette, man! What on earth makes you think he's there?"

"I heerd a sort of sawin' noise when I were in the pantry, sir. It seemed to come from there."

"Sawing? Queer. . . . Well, take someone with you and search."

He got up, yawning, walked aft to glance in the compass, back to the mizzen rigging and leaned out, the old quest again alive in his brain.

A vast swirl was there, something vanishing in it which he had just missed.

He leaned out farther, the notion aroused by the use of that one word "sawing" obliterated by the glimpse he obtained as he stretched out to search the ship's side.

CHAPTER XII

ULAR IKAN

SOMNOLENCE troubled Grey no longer. He was alert, his mind busy with this new danger, busy piecing together facts which his experience as an amateur diver had taught him. At first he felt inclined to consult Dr Challoner; but shrank from doing so because it seemed possible the whole thing might fizzle out. He would figure as a prophet of disaster when he was uncertain whether danger existed. He must make sure first what clung to the ship. No doubt it was one of the cephalopod tribe; but the loom of it was so great he could scarcely credit his forecast. It seemed immense, an exaggeration due perhaps to the glow that wrapped it.

He had some knowledge of the smaller fry who were its brothers; their rapidity in pursuit; the beastly, sac-like body they were concerned to fill; but this, if an approximate were possible, would be equipped with tentacles forty or fifty feet long and of immense strength.

The bosun came near to report that Mr Elgar was not in the lazaret, and the sawing had ceased. Grey, disturbed in the midst of calculations which seemed essential, brusquely ordered a continuation of the search and marched as before—up and down beneath the boats upon the skids; up and down, troubled.

A beast as large as the one he visualized was powerful enough to climb so high that it could search the ship's decks for food. He had no doubt at all there were monstrous organisms of this kind whose hunting-ground was the slime and black darkness of the ocean bed. He could not forget that although the parrot-

like head and beak of the beast was under water, it had methods of discovering, through its tentacles, the food it required. Sight scarcely seemed essential. It was equipped to do battle with the sperm whale and sometimes to win. It was equipped to wage war in water so deep, no ray of light ever penetrated it; where sound never came, where instinct alone enabled the monster which had survived to pass from gluttony to gluttony until presently it lay inert to provide food for its enemy.

To hearten Grey as he walked came a memory of his recent experiences in Manilla Harbour. With a diver's helmet strapped to his shoulders and a thin pipe feeding him with air, he had moved across the sea bed to a rock which had the appearance of a miniature Gibraltar. A shadow lurked amidst a cluster of anemones and medusæ which were bending like wind-swept grass; something evolved from that shadow—bright in line, swift, large-eyed. Then a green ball which had been standing stationary not far from the rock which screened Grey, became red, sprang like a flash and the bright thing was held on the end of one arm.

Grey's first experience of a lesser octopus ended as he watched it tear the bright thing apart, the parrot bill with which it tore, the sac quivering as it swallowed . . . the sudden change of colour as it disappeared.

It had all happened very swiftly, so swiftly he stood like one mesmerized—then just as he cast off his weights he happened to glance round .

A thing like an elephant's trunk waggled in the current quite near him. It had horrible pink lips, opening and shutting all down a sort of slit—and in an

instant Grey had let go the weights and shot to the surface, certain the devil was after him. He remembered he was in such a scare he tumbled into the boat sidelong and was nearly suffocated before the men could remove his helmet and release him.

That was real enough, he decided; the boatmen had no doubt of it. They called it *Ular ikan*,* whatever that might mean, but he discovered afterwards that he had been in touch with one of the tentacles of an octopus. Someone said it was the roar of the air escaping beneath his chin that saved him—for when a man goes down in the shallows wearing a helmet only, the water is kept from his mouth by the pressure of air. To keep erect is essential. To be ready with the signal cord a necessity—coolness, in other words, if you would live.

Considering the affair in the light of this new discovery, he wondered what sort of fight he could have put up had the thing actually seized him. He knew so little of its habits then; now, as he walked the deck thrashing out details culled from many sources, he knew he would never have got away, and remembered how vulnerable were these under-sea creatures; how with a knife between his teeth a man will dive beneath a shark and rip it up before it can turn; how with a knife or an axe or a cutlass it would be possible to lop this beast if it sought food.

He reached his cabin thinking thus; discovered Raffles lying on the settee fast asleep and sat beside him wistfully acknowledging his immunity from care. He longed for sleep. . . and instantly from some unknown cell came the song-like voice of his mother

* Snake fish.

—a cry memorized, importunate, vibrant with despair . . .

He was overwrought, too weary for reasoned thought. It seemed that the cabin rang with that cry—yet it failed to wake Raffles. A smile reached his lips. Perhaps he talked with Mums. What was at the back of it . . . how was it possible?

Guessing could not aid Grey here. He fell back on the opinion Dr Challoner offered, scarcely daring to accept it. He bent over his brother acknowledging his impotence—aware of the influence, whatever it was, half-terrible half-beautiful, that touched them first in Hong-Kong Bay. It was there Raffles entered the net. It now seemed to portend his death. But why? What had he done to incur death? In his calmer moments Grey refused analysis, because he believed, in spite of his Eastern training, miracles no longer occurred; yet now under the benign influence of that loved voice reason went by the board and he was content to trust even as a little child.

He had an impression as he rested there, his eyes on Raffles, that someone argued: "But is it strange she loves him? Is he not her baby in spite of his years? Does not a mother, while loving all, love her youngest best . . . and consider his danger!"

He stirred at this and found unconsciously he held the boy's hand. He shivered without knowing why . . . an idea . . . Something at the heart of things? A fugitive shadow across the port which passed as he leaned forward. Gone! . . . The influence again supreme, giving new sensations, fears; the influence that wrapped them both; Raffles who slept and dreamed, Grey who was awake and prayed for light.

Both wrapped in it. Trapped, maybe—while slowly the links were forged which would bind them eternally or leave one to face the end.

“Quite beautiful!” the voice said in Grey’s ear as he watched the boy’s veiled eyes, curly hair, dark as her own who appraised his beauty; his straight, clean limbs and easy attitude of grace. He nodded acquiescent and the voice ran on: “You know I could not spare you, Harold, for you are mine; but him I made of my own flesh, like as two peas with myself—breath for breath, lip and eye and hair and limb as I am, and I only. I set my thought on this you understand, before he came; for I feared to lose him as I was like to lose you. I dreaded my husband’s roving blood which had set its mark on you . . . believed I did not share it and would have the boy all mine . . . one who would inherit my gift of song—and he did . . . only to throw it away at sea. God willed it otherwise, you understand. The sea claimed him as it claimed my father; yours, you yourself—all, all I loved. The sea, Harold, which smiles even as it slays; tears at the hearts of women and leaves them hungry for the life it has stolen. Does death discriminate against the unfit? Remember your father and answer that. . . . So I leave my boy in your hands. He is in danger . . . God give you courage! . . .” And even as the words ceased a shadow crossed the port—an arm outstretched, having pink gums where fingers are found on men and apes.

Far off was the voice which mingled with the lap of the sea as ripples broke on the ship’s high side. Incredibly clear seeing it came from afar; stirring

yet infinitely beautiful to the man's tired brain as he sat there accepting his burden, acknowledging his lack of knowledge. He said softly: "Whence comes the danger, how can I arrest it?" and waited silent for answer.

Nothing now but the clip, clip, clip of the sea beneath the port; the staccato notes which come when ships are halted by a calm; the clang of a sail, jingle of hanks, and here something which baffled reason and held two lives for ransom . . . dreams, if you will, but plainly Raffles asleep, his hand finger by finger linked in Harold's . . . Raffles who perhaps had heard. Had not Challoner said it was possible?

Grey released his hand. A wisp of white flashed by and the man twisted slowly, his glance passing about and about. . . . Nothing there! No one! The influence gone—a shadow plain across the port.

Immediately it became imperative to discover what caused it. Something, Grey's instinct told him, glued to the ship's bottom. Still there! was his thought. Here at all events was danger! He turned and touched Raffles' bare arm. Not a move. He would sleep the clock round, good luck to him!

Grey's hair stirred as he climbed to the bunk, drew the curtains and looked out. Softly he moved, preparing to pounce, saw the windsail pushed askew; searched for an explanation and failed to discover it. He bent the sail in shape and again peered through the port.

Far down the shape loomed as before—a mass which gave out coruscations, jerky, irregular. Verification slouched there under sea, deep—deeper even than when first he had seen it. Grey's brain leaped from solution

to question, from question to refusal. How prove either . . . how test it? From a boat, perhaps, came the notion. . . . Oh! Hell! He crawled back scared stiff by the notion that Raffles watched him!

The boy had not stirred. Lord! what a funk about nothing. He was all a-yaw as sailors say. No reason for it either, if you refuse to consider influences; phenomena intangible but transmissible through space.

Slowly Grey's belief was being undermined. Challoner's statement had been a blow; but now he began to understand there are forces, metaphysical, perhaps, which in times of stress inspired a belief in the spiritual world in spite of preconceived opinions; compelled a change even in the field of consciousness; left a man alone—stranded between the supernal and the mundane view . . . left him to God. He shrugged it out amazed.

Whatever were the facts he felt their burden as never before. The reiteration of his mother's fears troubled him until he had assured himself his brother slept. Lord! how weary was this Chief who was supreme. If only he knew what to do; what precautions to adopt, he could take steps. But this intangible structure of Djinn flavour was beyond thought; inconceivable. Better the volcano than this!

His eyes caught the glint of the two swords which hung crossed at the head of his bunk. Once his father had worn them, a present one, from some defunct Maharajah whose life he had saved—engraved upon the blade, "*Om! Mani padme, hum,*" as he had expected. A service cutlass the other, workman-like, ready for

use. He took it down in turn for no reason other than the undefined notion that it might be useful in an emergency. He found his belt, buckled it and instantly left the cabin. After a time he came near the rail in the ship's waist.

No occasion to climb here. Everywhere was a sort of *cheval de frise* of bulwark, ragged in spite of Chips'* smoothing with plane and adze—whole stretches swept clean away, only the sturdier ribs upstanding. He could lie in the waterways here and look over, perhaps learn something. He did so and found the shape still there. It moved nearer as he watched. Just the phosphorescent glow of it, slowly pulsing to the surface. In the midst, like the body of a giant tarantula was a kind of animate sac from which little spirts of flame darted like fireworks from a set piece. The thing became outlined more plainly the higher it climbed. A finger of light appeared pushed forward a long distance; another undulated beneath the mizzen channel-plates whence the rigging stretched to the masthead; others fumbled loosely abreast the ladder by which men reached the poop. A knot of them appeared all intertwined and writhing blindly, as in some insane strife, one about the other, amidst dim curves of phosphorescent light.

Perhaps sixty feet lay between the sagging arms which held it against the ship's side, while the sac moved up and down with every undulation of the sea. It came no nearer the surface, but clung there sending out feelers to search for food.

By day Grey was aware the thing would never be seen unless it stretched forth an arm. With less

* The carpenter's patronymic on all wind-jammers.

luminosity it would be difficult to see it at night ; but at the moment it was plain—so plain that a question no longer remained. The sea had given them a monster—tenacious and of incredible strength, which they must fight.

An arm lifted not for the first time slowly as though in challenge. It stretched its length above the rail and Grey rose, instantly drawing his cutlass. The thing swayed overhead, aimlessly as it appeared. Blind it was, yet it sawed the air, nosing about as though it scented the man's presence. High up it began to curve and Grey saw the pink rows of suckers, like toothless gums, expanding and contracting as it bent. Then with a swift dart the thing fastened on a section of the torn rail and strove to pull it away. The Chief crept nearer, his brain reeling, his eyes on that swaying tentacle pulling with fingerless clutch at the wood. In spite of his knowledge horror gripped him. The beast was immense. He struck expecting death and ten feet of one arm lay upon the rail. He wrenched free his cutlass, watching for miracles, for some sign of rage, pain—blood ; but nothing happened. He stood back stifling laughter. A-yaw ; plainly a-yaw !

The piece he had cut off remained flaccid ; the piece which was left slowly disappeared—as though curious to discover what had occurred. Again with blood running cold Grey prodded at the section he had won. No one must see it ; he pushed at it with the point of his sword, dislodged it, angry beyond words, and tumbled it overboard. Doubtless he thought, panting, the beast would eat it. Was it not cannibal—unclean, the devil-fish of sailors, past, present and to come ?

He came on tiptoe past a hole in the bulwark, aware

that at any moment another arm might appear, swaying perhaps within reach, that it would be necessary to cut at it swiftly ; lop it off ; lop off each as it arrived—and wait, wait until the creature at length was a sac and nothing more. Then, possibly, there would be peace. A sound disturbed him and he reached his cabin in a panic imagining that by some legerdemain the Thing had captured Raffles and was dragging him to the port. Hot and cold flushes passed as he entered and saw an arm stretched across the aperture ; the winds' l moving, saw it disappear.

Then in an instant he was leaning across the bunk, closing the port, screwing it up lest by chance the thing should fumble its way back and find Raffles.

How the boy slept ! He turned to look at him, aware for the first time of fear, and instantly was on his knees beside him, his arms about him, cheek touching cheek—beautiful in his protective instinct ; while with his lips Grey spoke, answering the voice that had called him : “ Safe, safe, dear heart ! Safe, please God, till I bring him back and give him to you . . . ”

And having spoken, feeling a strange exaltation, he rose to go on deck.

As he passed out of the lobby a sinister figure came to the end of the alleyway and halted before the door ; halted of set purpose, stared into the cabin where Raffles slept, his cheeks flushed like a child.

For some minutes he waited there his eyes on the boy. His lips moved without sound ; stealthy was his pose as he searched his pockets one by one. A sound ! A man walking the grating in stockinged feet—Williams alert, escaping the way he came, gone.

It was Dr Challoner who entered from his cabin on the other side of the lobby. He wanted water and came with an empty carafe to fill in the pantry, caught sight of a figure who fled on his approach and halted beside the Chief's cabin, saying :

"Now what in the world made the fellow about turn in that fashion?"

He put the carafe down on the pantry table and pursued: "Looks as though the skipper was free!" he mused. "Well, if he comes my way it will be unpleasant—for the skipper!"

He passed into the cuddy where the guard sat oppressed by the heat—asleep, and waited a moment uncertain. He saw how it was. The men had grown accustomed to the docile figure they guarded. Nothing had happened to make them suppose he meditated reprisals. He had heard that some considered guards and strait-jackets unnecessary, that Grey was unduly harsh. What was a mere interloper to do? Wake him?

He leaned over and touched him. The man sprang alert and saluted.

"Yes—it is hot. I understand that—but, between ourselves, I shouldn't give way to it. That prisoner of yours was outside a moment ago and . . ."

"He never left his cabin, sir—I'll take my davy. He'd have to open 'is door, an' if he did that he'd wake me wiv this," he pointed to a thin cord, certain of his statement.

"I know nothing of that, my man, and don't wish to; but you may take it from me he was in the lobby by Captain Grey's cabin when I came in—and I didn't like what I saw of him. Think it out. I shall make no report unless I am compelled."

He returned, picked up the carafe, filled it, passed Grey's cabin and went out.

Meanwhile, crouched near the place where the Thing had thrust forth its tentacles, Grey leaned over the waterways. More calm now, he questioned whether it were possible to injure an organism which could in the course of time replace the sucker he had lopped. Maybe it was nursing its hurts, possibly he had slain it. Anything seemed feasible as he leaned out searching the place where it clung.

Phosphorescence dimly wrapped it, wrapped the ship all down her side ; stirring here and there as the water gushed, flashing farther out occasionally like summer lightning—while the stars tossed silver dust upon the sea. Nothing else for an hour, then as Grey despaired, a group of tentacles rose wobbling above the ship's rail and he drew back gripping his cutlass.

Two, three, perhaps four curved overhead in a wriggling maze and one suddenly stooped, pink gums expanding and contracting as though it scented game. Grey struck swiftly and a great piece lay at his feet unstirred by any tractile motion ; just flaccid ; black slime oozing at the cut. Other tentacles unsteadily followed. They twisted together like a cluster of boas dangling from a tree and he hacked at them—backward, forward, until again he was free to examine what lay on deck.

He was conscious of a great horror, of repulsion. He struck and struck in a blind fury that had no relation to fear, yet was born of the fear that automatically accompanies danger. The rage of a man overwrought,

fighting for life. The knowledge that once a sucker had taken hold, no power he could exert would free him. Death inevitable and horrible stood near. With beak and hooked teeth he would be pulled asunder to give life to a monster ; a bloodless, brainless sac which lived to eat—always and at all times to eat. And there before him lay some of the arms that fed the Thing—flaccid piping . . .

A man stood near when Grey looked up. He came close, saying : “ Then it was true, sir ? ” in quaint amazement.

The Chief, sweating at every pore, answered like one disturbed while committing some horrible crime : “ True ? What do you mean ? ”

“ I see a thing like that,” he pointed, “ like a nelaphant’s trunk, sir, bobbin’ about looking fer somethin’—p’raps ten foot above the rail, smooth, slimy, with an openin’ at the end fer all the world like a trunk. . . . ”

“ When did you see it ? ”

“ Mornin’ after we got shut of that geyser, sir . . . I’m goin’ along fer me cawfee an’ see it stickin’ up abreast the main ’atch. An’, says I to meself : ‘ oo the ’ell are you ? ’ An’ I puts me pot down, hikes a belaying pin from the rail an’ made a run for it. ’It it, too. Copped it right on the snout as you might say, an’ jumped back . . . ”

“ Why ? ”

“ Didn’t like the look of it, sir—not close, I didn’t. So I cleared out. P’raps half-way across the ’atch I looked round. Nothin’. S’elp me—not a bloomin’ sign. Sir—I made sure of that. I took a good square look overside, up, along, everywhere, but there weren’t

a vistage . . . an', it seems all likely I've bin seein' snakes."

"True. Did you tell anyone?"

"Not me, sir. I might, but as I'm taking me cawfee again I see the cook look out of his door an' ast him. Ee says: 'No,' ee says, 'got sumfin' else to do—why?' I told him: "'Cause I see the Muckin-bird go sailin' by, an' I'd missed it by an' 'air.'"

Grey let him run on. It helped him to recover. It brought laughter—queer chuckles, as of conspirators—it put in his hand a coadjutor whom he might trust, till the last tentacle lay oozing on deck and peace was assured.

He nodded over this, adding: "There will be four more . . . perhaps six. If I can get them we can laugh, but not yet. No talk, though. Not a word even to your pal. When I am below you will be here at night. Watch and watch while it's dark—Understand?"

"An' daytime, sir?"

"Leave that to me. You have not seen anyone else about, have you? Dr Challoner, for instance?"

"Nary a soul, sir—barin' him up there on the lookout."

"Good—remember, not a word."

CHAPTER XIII

THE CHIEF'S CABIN

WITH the yellowing dawn came a breeze from the south-east, hot from the Australian plains that gave it drouth. The men skipped to it bare-foot on the wet decks, singing and trimming sail as though they supposed their hilarity would keep it constant. Yet at noon it was calm ; the sky white-hot, the islands to leeward, sun-scorched blurs sleeping on the horizon, the sea aping a pool where trout lie in shadow amidst the stones and weeds.

Far astern a prau sat becalmed, like a gull settling with lifted wings.

Grey had been up all night yet he could not rest. The blue-backed chart which was his guide showed a series of dots and circles extending for one hundred and thirty miles in a north-easterly direction. They were the Paternoster and Postillion Islands, reefs, shoals, which they must pass on their way to Salayer Strait.

With a westerly wind Grey could have avoided all these groups, infested as they were with shoals and coral patches ; kept nearly due east with Lombok, Sumbawa and Flores to starboard ; deep water under the ship, until finally Timor hove in sight and he could have hauled his wind making all speed for the Indian Ocean.

Steamboating, in other words ; but *Kow-Loon*, in spite of her gallantry, immunity under stress, the *mantra* which was a panacea for all evil, a compendium of all knowledge, a treasury of all wisdom, was compelled to accept just those winds the Good God found her. So, too, with Grey. He kept the deck like a shadow,

sometimes in his chair, sometimes leaning over searching for the Thing he had fought ; sometimes pouring over his chart, Findlay, and measuring distances.

The Thing did not appear. When night came he could trace no loom, no phosphorescence. He began to think it possible they had escaped ; that he had killed the beast—or that the sea which had charged down upon them during the forenoon had swept it away.

Then to damp his elation came the memory that Elgar was gone also. Gone in spite of the fact that there had been no wind to speak of, no sea, and *Kow-Loon*, except when troubled by that instability which no bonze could have foreseen, lay as a ship should.

The only suggestion that held a glimmering of actuality came from one of the men who had seen him on the fo'c'sle head shortly before he was missed. He had a theory that the jib sheet had flicked him overboard, though why lookout had not seen what occurred he could not explain. As a side issue it seemed equally reasonable to suggest that lookout had tipped him overboard—a corollary his shipmates refused.

Grey had his solution of the mystery ; but because it was impossible to prove it, he kept his own council. Of what use was surmise when surmise led merely to a tragic and horrible dénouement for which no one could vouch. With equal ease he might turn suspicion on the mad skipper—who, as all concurred, had managed to break adrift that night. . . . So it went on ; the talk of a day.

And Williams remained.

Had some harassed wight among the crew toppled him overboard to scotch their ill-luck, as the men of Tarshish cast forth Jonah few would have been found to arraign their saviour. There were those among them who declared the man was less mad than he appeared. They said his eyes were never still—"all over the shop" was the phrase, and that "what he didn't know was not worth learning"—an aphorism at sea of deep meaning. And now that he had recovered from his expedition in search of the Heavenly Throne he sat in his place at the head of the poop ladder, earning his pay like a man—as Sails said; placid or gibbering as the mood served. But there he was safe, wired in. In the cabin it was otherwise.

He had just arrived when Dr Challoner and his daughter came up from breakfast. He sat with his back to the sun, the umbrella open and tilted over his shoulder. He glanced obliquely at them, unstirring; the Bible on his knees. Thereafter he turned leaves incessantly, searching out texts. He appeared to be so busy preparing for another world that he had no time to consider this. Sufficient that someone did the ship's work, navigated, attended him, brought him food. He babbled, sitting in the white-hot sunlight; spoke of weighty matters concerning life and death; of Hell-fire, the Resurrection and his entry into the presence of God—while the ship lying so white and still beneath him, might with her gossamer wings have been some craft of Heavenly design, sent to carry him thither.

But the Doctor was unconvinced.

During the forenoon watch Challoner, who had

been discussing the situation with his daughter, crossed over to join Grey who rested beneath a small awning, his legs lifted in a Roorkee chair.

"What is this I hear, Captain, of Mr Elgar?" he asked as he drew near and sat. "Is it true?"

"That he is missing? Yes, I'm afraid so. At all events we haven't traced him yet."

"What can have happened—have you any clue at all?"

"Absolutely none."

"My daughter suggests he may have fallen down one of the hatchways, and is unable to make anyone hear. I explained that no doubt you had taken steps to decide all such questions—but . . ."

"Of course it was possible. Unfortunately that must be ruled out. We have searched the ship from keel to truck."

"Um!" Challoner paused, glanced round and, leaning forward, said: "I suppose that madman had no hand in it?"

"The skipper? But it happened at night, when he was locked up."

Again Challoner halted, his eyes on Grey's, noting the strain he had endured.

"You look rather done, Captain. No sleep last night if I may comment . . ."

"Not a wink—but we are used to that."

"Yes; but not concurrently with mental strain, my dear man! Together they are fatal."

"I have had longer spells," Grey smiled, interested in this apt diagnosis.

"What is the man's nationality?" came next to puzzle him.

"The skipper's? I haven't a notion, but he looks like a Parsee."

"A touch of the tar-brush undoubtedly, Balooch, Afghan—one of the hill tribes perhaps. . . . What is he doing in your service—in Green's?"

"Shâhdara Williams," Grey commented, refusing the question. "A queer mixture. I believe he spells it SHADARA."

"Wisely, seeing the other half of him is Welch. Shâhdara, though! Isn't there some show place up in the Punjab with a name like that—Amritsar or Lahore?"

Grey turned on his elbow, half-rising with a gust of delight: "Of course there is. Lahore; the tombs of Shâhdara across the river, you remember. I've been puzzling over the name since we left."

"Just so. The story of a drunken emperor and a beautiful woman, isn't it? We passed through on our way from Karachi. I have notes of it—at least I hope so—in Batavia."

Grey sat twisting this in his mind. It was a story he knew from his mother who had commented on it long ago; but there were other issues involved in the memory—blank as yet. Forgotten.

Challoner interrupted this without apology. "But why is the fellow called Shâhdara? Isn't it obvious there must be some connection between the place and the man. Only a woman would christen an Englishman Shâhdara to bring to her mind some event which bound both. You say you have an impression that he was on the *Sorisha* with your father. You spoke also of your father's journals, one of which I caught sight of in your cabin. Isn't it possible, if your surmise is

correct, there is some mention of the man in the journal which might give us an inkling ? ”

“ It’s possible, of course. I meant to look through *Sorisha’s* voyage, but I haven’t had time.”

“ Can I be of any assistance ? ” Challoner asked.

“ You can if you will, sir. There’s the book.”

The Doctor took it saying simply : “ Gladly . . . Something to do.” Then, after a flutter of leaves : “ No—I don’t trust the fellow. As a matter of fact I question if he is as mad as appears. The religious side is serious and doubtless it largely affects his judgment in other matters ; but there he is more or less governed, perhaps directed by fear, or the desire for revenge. . . . You know what those hill tribes are—folk on both sides of the Khyber. They live for it. You haven’t incurred his enmity in any way, I suppose ? ”

“ Except that I have locked him up, not that I know of. . . . What makes you think he had a hand in Elgar’s disappearance ? ”

“ Actually because I came upon him last night.”

“ On deck ? ”

“ Either going or coming back from it.”

“ What time was that ? ”

“ Perhaps one o’clock. He was in the entrance lobby, close to your cabin. I imagine he heard me coming—I was after a drink of water—for he turned at once and made off up the alleyway. I followed, but he had disappeared when I reached the saloon.”

“ Disappeared ? There was a man on duty there ? ” Grey sat up, turning the leg rests back.

“ Yes. I followed and spoke to him. He swore no one had passed him and showed me the locked doors.

I heard the drone of a voice within—there is no doubt of that.”

“Was the man awake and alert?”

“Sitting when I went in, but up in a second to salute,” Challoner minimized.

“I shall have to look into this,” Grey said. “It is a new issue.” He remained still, thinking, then asked: “Where was the skipper standing when you entered the lobby?”

“By your cabin door, but he was gone in a trice. I noticed your brother sleeping on the settee quite peacefully. . . . Actually, apart from all this, what I wished to suggest when I ventured to disturb you, is, that you will permit me to assist in the work of the ship—or in whatever way you consider best. I have yachted a good deal, years ago, and understand the theory of navigation. Perhaps, if Mr Elgar is not found I might be of some use?”

“Thank you. I am sure you could—but let me think it out. Jove! Yes, it would make no end of difference.”

“Capital!”

“But first I must go into this question of the skipper. I can’t understand it. It is one of the possibilities I seem to have overlooked. . . . And it may account for Elgar’s absence.” He rose suggesting that Challoner might care to join him, which was exactly what the Doctor desired, and they went down together to the cabin entrance.

“He was standing there,” he said at once. “Your door was open. I had the impression he was fumbling in his pockets; searching for something. I could only see his back, but that was unmistakable, and he heard

me—twisted round and instantly scuttled off into the alleyway. This was in darkness, only the police light—rather dim . . . I was scarcely awake, you must remember, and did not move as quickly as I might. I came to your door and saw your brother lying there fast asleep, then made haste to follow. But the man had disappeared . . . locked in somewhere before I reached the cuddy door—so, although I could swear it was the skipper, you understand I did not see his face.”

“Quite.”

“I then spoke to the sentry and we tried the doors. . . . Now may I ask who keeps the keys?”

“The officer of the watch. They are passed from one to another as the watch changes. In the morning I take them.”

“I see. Then there can be no possibility of collusion with the sentry?”

“Absolutely no.”

“I notice he wore no strait-jacket,” Challoner went on, “and the sentry informed me it was removed at night. . . .”

“True. . . . But we may have to reconsider that,” Grey decided.

“I agree. Of course it seems a bit barbarous ; but,” he shrugged out, “if this man is of the type known as a homicidal maniac—which seems probable ; it will be necessary for all our sakes to do something to hold him.”

“Yes—undoubtedly ; but recollect my difficulty,” Grey pleaded. “There are men on board who consider he is harshly treated as it is. Sails is one of them—he disliked making the strait-jackets ! While Chips, who shares his cabin, argues he ought to be in

irons day and night. Possibly if the men knew me less well, I should have had deputations from them before this—and that would be awkward, if anything happened to the prisoner before we get home. It is a difficult proposition, Dr Challoner. One of our risks.”

“I remember what the little Scotsman said the other day; yet I am going to suggest, Captain Grey, you snap fingers at the men and at the law—if it be a law.”

“And if I find there are no loopholes in my system at present I shall consider it.”

Grey led up the alleyway and came into the cuddy. The skipper's quarters were on the starboard side aft, adjoining the after cabin. Forward of these were other cabins, all empty and locked. Beyond the bulkhead was the music-room as Grey called it—really the after cabin which extended the whole breadth of the ship and communicated by a door with the Captain's cabin.

The two men passed up trying the locks of each door in turn, entered the Captain's; examined every part, tapping here, testing there with the care of men who knew their task. But they found no clue. They walked quickly aft at this and entered the music-room and came again to the cuddy by the door on the port side. This was kept open always, so that the sentry, Grey explained, might hear if any attempt were made to break through.

All down the port side were cabins also, untenanted and unlocked. Challoner at once fastened on this.

“No doubt in the world,” he said, “this is where he vanished and lay low until it was possible to regain his cabin.”

"Did either of you search the after cabin?"

"No."

"Then he was there."

"Perhaps—still, you will lock these?"

"Certainly. It is a loophole. I will plug it." He sent the steward for the carpenter and in the interval examined each cabin, locked its door and removed the key. "Of course it is possible he has a key secreted somewhere, and in that way has succeeded in passing round through the music-room. There is no other exit except the ports and those I have had secured; now we will secure the doors."

Chips arrived at the moment and Grey took him in hand. "I want you to prepare an iron bar for each of these three doors," he ordered, indicating the two opening from the cabin into the cuddy, "and the door communicating between cabins and after cabin. Have two bars if you think one insufficient. I want to ensure that Captain Williams can't get through these doors even if he has a key to unlock them. You understand?"

He then went into details. The bars must be adjusted so that they could be removed by the people on deck when necessary; but the doors must remain closed even if unlocked by someone within.

Shortly after Grey and the Doctor went on deck. It was time for the noon sights and Challoner was to use the sextant for the first time. But Madeline had forestalled him. She stood with the instrument raised, the telescope at her eye, calling out to Raffles, who was near: "Is that red thing the sun? . . . It keeps running about, why won't it stay still?"

"That's because you haven't clamped the vernier," said Raffles.

"Which is it? I can't find anything to clamp with and what do you do when you clamp?"

"Screw up the screw that's at the back of the index," said the voice of Raffles.

"And which is the index, please? I said '*j'y suis j'y reste*' when I came on board and I stayed; but there isn't a screw to clamp with and the sun won't stay still."

"Let me . . ." said Raffles, laughing.

Then Dr Challoner appeared and said, quite in his best manner:

"Come! That's better. I shouldn't wonder if it effected a cure, too—what do *you* think, Captain?"

There was a flush on Grey's face as he came up the ladder, a smile on his lips, and the flush mounted when Madeline caught sight of him and came quickly nearer, saying: "Please show me. It's awfully difficult and your brother is laughing at me."

"As difficult as finding the Missing Link?" he asked, taking the sextant, his smile quite broad now.

"Worse; but you mustn't remember that or Dad will hear of it and then . . ."

"Just so. Trouble for Miss Challoner," he tossed back. "No—I won't remember. Now—let me show you. This is the vernier and this the index glass. The screw Billee called the clamp we don't use until we have brought the sun's reflection to the horizon—so, you see? Quite steadily and slowly, then we clamp it and get it exact afterwards. Take it in your own hands and do that again—looking over the top of the telescope."

She did so, saw the red image of the sun where it should be, clamped it crying her triumph : " Got it ! Got it first time—but it isn't exact . . . "

" Twist the tangent screw—the one in front of the vernier and it will bring it down. Look through the telescope."

She obeyed and decided it was going up.

" Then twist the screw the other way——" he ordered.

Again she cried : " Got it ! Got it ! Lovely ! " And asked : " What do you do now ? "

" Read the arc while I get the altitude ; then we can compare."

He did so ; showed her how to read it ; read his own and found they agreed within a few minutes of arc.

" Not bad ! " said he, " for a beginner, Miss Challoner—especially with the sun nearly overhead. Now, release the clamp and do it again. Do it half a dozen times and you will be perfect. . . . "

" I shall show your brother first," she laughed, " for the second time may be less perfect."

She crossed to do so, received Billee's congratulations and left the sextant with her father.

A quiet night. The first watch set and a young moon like a silver sickle deep in the west—a planet clinging to it in occultation.

In the cabin silence, the skipper sitting, his eyes fixed on the bulkhead which held no picture to attract him ; restless—already aware of the bars which his enemy had placed to hold him. His words, when he spoke, strange, not of the Bible, not of his sins ; but Urdu, Pashtu—perhaps Persian.

Three bells on deck. The cry of lookout announcing sidelights which burned as they should ; the flick of hanks, occasionally the clang of sails thrown hard upon the rigging. Grey and Miss Challoner walking the fore end of the poop, a question from the latter unanswered.

It seemed possible the cry of lookout had covered it. The girl glanced up and said again : " Please, why aren't you wearing your belt and sword to-night as you were the other night ? "

This was not blurred at all events, and Grey stood still, seeking Madeline's eyes but it was too dark. For a second his heart thumped—then he walked as before, saying : " What a funny question. We don't wear swords in these days, Miss Challoner, although my father did. We have a dozen pikes, a few cutlasses and half a dozen rifles on board—not enough to fight the prau that clings to us over there if he chose to attack."

" Really ? Then why were you wearing one the night I speak of ? Was it because of the mad skipper ? "

" There was challenge in this. Grey was in a difficulty yet he could not believe she had seen what happened ; nor did he wish to speak of it. After a moment's hesitation he answered evenly : " No—it was not the skipper ; though, of course, he is dangerous."

She laid one hand on his arm arresting him, looked him straight in the face and whispered : " Won't you trust me—at all events I am not dangerous."

He was torn by the desire to lie, to brazen it out, yet facing her did not lie. He said : " Tell me what makes you think I won't trust you. I hate fencing ;

but there are some matters I don't wish to talk about now. Won't that suffice?"

She shook it off. "No—no, it won't. We are in the same boat, and it is only fair we should understand what we face. If it wasn't Captain Williams, what was it?"

"Tell me what you saw and I will try to explain. Where were you?"

"In my cabin. It was too hot to sleep so I got up and sat on my table before the port. Then you came out of the entrance lobby and crept along over there" she pointed to the starboard side. "Then I saw you had a sword. First I heard it jingle as you came out, then I saw it . . . and you went creeping along by the bulwarks till you came opposite the main hatch and lay down looking over the side . . . I was awfully frightened. You had looked so—done-for a few days I thought you were tired of it and—and were going to jump overboard. I nearly screamed out . . . I should have run along to stop you but I—I had no coat, nothing to slip on so I couldn't. . . . Please, someone will have to lend me a coat in case anything happens. I simply couldn't get into a boat again unless I have one. . . . It's so hard and shivery at night. Can't you see that?"

"Of course I can, now you speak of it," Grey broke in, eager to side-track this thing she had witnessed. "Stupid of me not to think of it. . . . I will get you one of mine—if you will have it."

"Wouldn't one of Billee's fit me better?" she asked, smiling up at him, entrancing, for the first time.

"Certainly it would. You are about the same height and, and"—with a rush he said it—"about the same build. . . . I'll go and rummage at once."

"No—please, don't do that. Lend me one of yours for to-night. Billee's turned in, you know, or ought to be."

"How pat that comes," Grey laughed. "Since we left home he was Raffles, always. Now, in a jiffy, you make him Billee just as Mums does, and we follow suit."

"Of course. He couldn't be Raffles to a girl. One would have to make it Mr Raffles—which is absurd. He's just Billee if you look in his eyes, and yours is . . . No, we don't know yours. Dad said the other day you look like a Viking only you lack the hair and horns. . . . So, you see from that, we talk about you both and have even ventured to wonder whether you have a picture of Mums, as you call her, we might see. We should like to know her. Really we don't wish to get off the ship if a mailboat comes by; unless you wish it. . . . Imagine me facing a saloon full of people all in their tourist beautifuls in this kit! We shall veto it unless something dreadful happens to Captain Williams. . . . And you push us off. . . .

"Even then—I mean if we had to go for your sakes; we should want to know where to find you in England. I should want to see Mums. I didn't think men bothered very much about their mothers and sisters when they were on service. You didn't mind me calling her Mums, did you? It's so much easier than Mrs Grey. Mrs Grey means visiting-cards, frills and fripperies—calling and all those silly stiff things we do in England and never do out here. . . . Now, please, let us sit down, and try to believe we want to help you take the ship home. . . . And explain what it was I saw you doing that night when you had

your sword. It isn't inquisitiveness, for I saw what you did—and I'm afraid . . ."

"I could have sworn it," Grey flashed at once, thrilled in a way he did not understand, "only I dared not risk saying so. Come down to leeward. I'll bring another chair. There's no wind, and it will be cooler there. . . . That do?" He placed it and she snuggled down at once, saying: "Delightful."

"Now fire away with your questions and don't be alarmed by my answers. The beast's dead. But mind, no one, not even Billee knows about the sword. He saw the Thing; but I told him it had gone. . . ."

"Splendid!" She breathed as he paused.

"Now let us get it done with—you don't ask for horrors?"

"Not I—what was it?" she whispered.

"One of the cephalopod tribe—probably with ten arms. . . . Rather a big one."

"How big?"

"I can only guess. The tentacles may have been twenty or forty feet long. They came up searching for food. No doubt the geyser scared it from its hunting-ground and it happened to come near us and clung. The trouble was I dared not let anyone see what happened. There would have been a panic, for you know there are all sorts of goblin stories of these things crawling on board ships and eating the crew; but they don't. A tentacle or two may come up, or a bunch, seeking food; but the rest are busy clinging to the ship. They fumble about. When one came up I cut it off. . . . Yes—and I was more scared than you can guess. But nothing happened. Nothing else came so I went aft to see if Billee were still asleep. . . ."

"And was he?"

"Yes—thank God."

"I saw you go," she cried. "You *ran* aft. . . . And I saw you come back. I seemed to wait hours. Then I saw you striking right and left. . . . Then you ran away to your cabin again and, do you know, I couldn't stay still. I just had to go. . . . So I looked about outside and went along to see what it was you were cutting. But there was nothing. . . . Everything tidy. . . . Nothing. What *did* you do?"

"Pushed it all overboard. I daren't leave it for the people to see," he said. Then, swiftly earnest: "Satisfied? Don't want any more details. . . Believe what I've said?"

"Every word. . . . But will it come back?"

"No. Probably it's drowned."

"How?"

"Well—I imagine the sucker end closes when under water . . . and I cut off a lot of arms. Forget it and come down to my cabin while I show you Mums. Where's your father?"

"Writing up his journal."

"Um! Not much to write home about here."

"I don't know, there wasn't much to write of in Japan where we were; but Dad seemed to think there was. I will call him."

They met at the foot of the ladder and Grey led at once to his cabin, wondering at the beautiful intimacy of their chat. Challoner came close as they passed along and said: "I'm deep in the *Sorisha* trip. He's in it right enough, the journal I mean. Curious story! Can't spare a minute, unless it's an urgent matter."

"Not a bit," Grey joked. "I was merely going to

introduce you and Miss Challoner to my mother's picture."

"I am sorry. My chance must wait. Where is your brother sleeping?"

"On the poop in my lounge."

"Good."

Challoner vanished. The two passed on together.

Grey opened his cabin door and as suddenly closed it, saying: "Sorry, Miss Challoner. I'm afraid we must postpone . . . Someone here . . . Er—— Will you ask your father to come at once?"

She ran instantly and Grey entered. He closed the door and went down on his knees beside a man who lay inert; with all his muscles relaxed, his face hidden by one arm which lay heavily across it.

The man's eyes stared, wide open. He looked scared as Grey bent over him, his ear down, fingers on the pulse of the wrist which had lain across his face. He was still in that posture when Challoner came in and sank down beside him.

They opened the man's clothing and made a detailed examination but found no wound. Yet he was dead—bronzed, hearty, not old, a typical leading seaman, always to the front. They straightened his limbs, closed his eyes and stood up.

"Another," Grey said with a sob deep down; "but what killed him?"

"Heart-failure or strangulation, my friend; impossible to say which at this juncture. Who is it?"

"Castle—one of our best men—he was on duty in the cabin."

CHAPTER XIV

AT FAULT

"THIS can't go on. I must see Williams," Grey raged when they stood outside. "Will you join me, or would you rather go back to your daughter? She may be scared. It was so unexpected, I'm afraid I was abrupt. But," he explained, "I must see the cabins aft."

"I agree. It is very desirable. . . . Give me three minutes and I will be with you," Challoner answered and was gone.

He was back in five, saying: "I gave her to understand it was a heart attack. To-morrow she will be better able to cope with the truth, if your surmise is correct. Now—what is the proposal?"

"I am going to see him—if necessary to tax him with it."

"You have some notion of his object, I suppose. On the face of it it seems senseless," Challoner argued, as they moved up the alleyway.

"I am groping my way, sir—nothing more subtle—the idea at the back of *his* mind, I take it, is to scare the men so that they will refuse to keep watch."

"Quite. I agree. Quite possible. It did not strike me from that angle."

"It is the sort of thing that would breed ghost stories and I know not what beside. Sailors are gullible folk if you work on superstition."

They entered the cuddy where the lamp hanging beside the swinging tray in the skylight threw islands of light together with compensating continents of gloom. The steady drone of a man in supplication to his Maker made an undercurrent of sound,

uncanny to men strung taut, expecting they knew not what.

Grey led the way by the starboard side, examining the doors as they went. They were secure; the new fastenings in place, precisely as when the carpenter left them at eight bells. They looked at each other in mute comment; like two conspirators engaged in tracking down their victim. They passed along the bulkhead, throwing light from a bull's-eye lamp as they went. They reached the door by which the after cabin was entered.

Here Challoner gripped Grey's arm and leaning near, asked: "Have you any weapon, in case of necessity?"

Grey dived his right hand in his pocket and brought it out armed. "This," he whispered, at which Challoner nodded, immensely pleased—for knuckle-dusters are, as those who have seen them in action know, particularly safe either to knock your man out, or finish him, if they are used discreetly.

They stepped within. Here was no lamp, no light, and the bull's-eye had to do service. Grey moved very cautiously examining every foot of the cabin as he advanced, the weird undercurrent of supplication going on and on, like the drone of a priest far up by the altar in a dim church. They came to the bulkhead, flashed the light on the door and saw the iron bar in its place.

Again they glanced at each other. Mystification was in the look this time, some hesitation—as though they said, what's the use? The man's in there right enough. He hasn't been out! But if the comment ran so, Grey tossed it aside. "We will open this," he

said, at which Challoner nodded, emphatic in his readiness.

They lifted the bar from the cleats upon which it sat, cleats that were screwed firmly to the door, and set it down. Then Grey produced a key, turned it gingerly in its place and unlatched the door, opened it, looked in.

Except that the man's voice was plainer, less of a drone, no change was apparent; but Grey, leaning near Challoner, whispered: "He is in the farther cabin . . . this is the bathroom, lavatory, cupboard and so on. There is another door. He is beyond, in the farther cabin. . . ."

And again Challoner acknowledged he understood. They passed on. It was quite dark but for a small gleam coming from the port which stood open. The lip-lap of the sea rippling under the ship's quarter accompanied their movements and increased when they opened the door. The voice no longer made supplication. It ceased. The cabin beyond was in darkness.

Grey entered in silence, his lantern throwing a long beam here and away, as he searched for the skipper; found him as a whisper touched their ears. "Ba! Ba! Black sheep," gentle as a prayer. He was sitting on the deck, a pillow at his back, his knees drawn up very much in the attitude he assumed when in the cage—his rather long arms clasped about them. And as they stood there uncertain, faltering both of them before the evidence they had obtained, the voice repeated:

"Ba! Ba! Black sheep," so low they could scarcely hear, "Ba! Ba! Black sheep," over and over again in varying modulations yet so meticulously it

seemed he was tasting the words, letting them run off his tongue while his ear gathered the sound thus made. Then with swift contempt came : "Twelve annas to the rupee ! Just that, Black sheep . . . Yes."

He sat so still, so unconscious of Grey and the Doctor, he might have been the image of a Buddha set in a temple deep in the forest before whom two worshippers lingered. . . . While the music of the sea entering at the open ports was of the trees when a breeze passes over them.

And so for some minutes they stood listening, listening ; staring at this man who looked like a Parsee and had the pallor of death on skin set in a blue-black forest—hirsute.

Williams, without book, or movement, began to recite from the one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm :

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence ?

"If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there ; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

"If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me ; even the night shall be a light about me.

"Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee ; but the night shineth as the day ; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

Grey had no heart to speak his thoughts. He touched Challoner's wrist and they withdrew, walking backwards, as men coming from the presence of Majesty ; what can we do ? their one thought.

They closed the door. The voice went on :

"For thou hast possessed my reins ; thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

"I will praise thee ; for I am fearfully and wonder-

fully made ; marvellous are thy works ; and that my soul knoweth right well . . . ”

They reached the farther door, closed and locked it ; stooped and made secure the bar which they had removed and passed into the lobby ; out past the boats which rested bottom up on the skids ; past the main fife-rail with its burden of pumps and braces and gear—out on to the main hatch where they might sit down and cool and no one could hear what they said.

“ No loophole in the defences,” Grey said, taking out his pipe and lighting it. “ As a matter of fact I’m wondering if we aren’t on the wrong tack.”

“ How ? ” Challoner asked, and he, too, lighted his pipe.

“ It seems absurd to consider him as a murderer—after listening to—to that Psalm.”

“ Does that mean you have a possible alternative in one of the crew ? ”

“ I haven’t considered it till this minute ; but what are we to make of it ? ” Grey asked.

“ That I am not able to say ; but if we concede madness we must be prepared to do violence to all our instincts ; to give him credit for a cunning which is beyond anything we can imagine—more especially as in this case his defence is from the Bible.

“ Then what do you suggest ? ”

“ Tell me what is beneath the cabin deck ? ”

“ The lazaret.”

“ Could he get into the lazaret ? ”

“ From his cabin ? No, unless there is a hidden trap-door—which certainly is not the case.”

“ Could he not cut a trap—he has had ample time ? ”

Grey sat quite still, his pipe withdrawn, held at arm's length. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "I had forgotten it . . ."

"Forgotten what?" Challoner pressed.

"Something the bosun said the night Elgar was missing . . ."

"Yes?"

"He had been looking for him and came to report. He said he couldn't find him unless he was in the hold or the lazaret. I said: 'Why the lazaret?' And he replied he heard someone sawing and it seemed to come from there."

"Um!" Challoner mused. "We had better examine that before we talk of the wrong tack—don't you agree?"

"Absolutely . . . but could it be done? The deck is teak."

"That makes it more difficult to accomplish, but if he has the tools not impossible."

"No. We will go down at once, if you like."

"It has to be faced," Challoner conceded, "and if that fails we must consider what you call the other tack."

They knocked out their pipes, sorrowfully walked aft and came to the pantry. Here they paused a moment listening. The skipper still droned supplication, or anathemas. They could not decide which. So they lighted two globe lamps, lifted the hatch and went down.

The examination was perfectly simple, if you eliminate the possibility of ricked necks, for it was overhead and the planks were set so close, were so seasoned and of a colour, that the smallest scratch

showed. They went over the whole deck which lay beneath the cabins, found nothing and emerged hotter than when they went down.

As they dowsed the lamps in the pantry, Challoner dried his brow and said: "That pushes us back on your theory, doesn't it, Captain?"

"Undoubtedly—and takes us on deck; but I am puzzled to account for the sawing the bosun heard. He's no child—and no fool."

It was fifteen minutes short of midnight when they emerged and Grey at once called the watch. To the bosun he spoke of what had happened, gave orders for the muster to be taken foreshore the main hatch; then asked what part of the ship he was in when he heard the sawing he reported on the night Mr Elgar was lost.

"Aft, sir, in the alleyway leading to the cabin."

"Where did the noise come from?"

"Lazaret, sir."

"Did you go down?"

"After I told you what I heard, yes, sir, but it wasn't happening any more."

"Have you heard it since?"

"Never, sir. An' I've had more than one prow around aft o' nights."

"Thank you—I forgot to ask you the next day. That will do, bosun."

At eight bells when all hands were present Grey, standing on the raised hatchway, spoke without preface:

"You men know what we are up against, in a way. I must now tell you what has occurred since. Sometime, after four bells, probably about five bells, I went into my cabin and found the man who should

have been on duty in the cabin lying on deck. He went on duty at four bells. When I opened my door I saw he was dead.

"Doctor and Miss Challoner were with me. There is no dispute over the facts. But we don't know how he came by his death. So I am putting it to you all. Someone killed him. We have examined the fastenings on Captain Williams' cabin. The doors have not been open. Now who killed this man—Castle ; your ship-mate ? Just think it over. We must find out. Find out each of you where your pals were between four and six bells. Who was in the fo'c'sle, who on deck ; if anyone is not accounted for it must be reported to me.

"You see how the thing stands—so just look at it without fear or favour and at eight bells come aft to muster, and give me your views. I think that is understood ? "

A roll of voices answered which Grey acknowledged. "Good. Relieve the watch, wheel and lookout. Bosun, get some hands with you and fix up a stretcher. Bring it to my cabin. . . . Mr Grey ! "

Raffles came forward.

"Let Mr Cobham know what has happened. Tell him to bring a chair up and sleep on the poop."

The night passed without further trouble ; a quiet night, luminous, the sea again touched all along the ship's side with the phosphorescent glow which had accompanied them in Sunda Straits. But it was curious to read the effect of Grey's speech. The men were still on calashee watch ; yet they sat or strolled about in groups, each watch keeping to its own.

No one brought out pillow or blanket : no one slept. No one dreamed of sleeping except in that far-off way which anathematized the law which barred sleep.

They were like men at Action Stations, waiting in the dark for something to pass which might open fire, get some one and vanish crowing. The Afterguard were in similar case beneath boats which sat keel-up on skids to screen them from attack. There were no absentees ; no solitary watchers as hitherto. They moved in pairs on duty ; in groups the rest. The helmsman was alone ; but Cobham slept at his elbow. Raffles in charge, keeping near the chair which held his brother.

From time to time he approached the open skylight ; stooped, put his head within, listened—returned to his short walk, up and down, down and up . . . monotonous—humiliating for one in command of *Kow-Loon*, a ship once pierced for thirty guns, “*Om ! Mani padme, hum*” on her scroll.

A whistle trilled the old beautiful call, and there followed from the bosun’s lungs : “Lay aft, all hands quarterdeck, muster !” And they came aft regardless of murder, shipwreck or the King’s enemies, to stand in line and answer, each of them for his pal.

In long and short phrasing they reported the result of cogitations which some resented. Mainly in the language of the sea it “panned out” as “All correct, sir” ; or “Ask another,” the latter words which left the meaning obscure.

These efforts Grey acknowledged as he might, while marching with Doctor Challoner and Mr Cobham down the line. Signals appeared which decided “the

other tack" had drawn a blank. Grey did not gainsay it. It had to be done, but the result, he told Challoner, was plain.

"As far as I can read them," the Doctor smiled, "everything is in a state of suspended animation—*noli me tangere* the attitude. "One that will pass," Grey said. "I know my men."

At four o'clock the bell tolled high on the fo'c'sle head, and the crew coming aft saw Castle, sewn in his last jacket, tilted into the sea while Grey read words that stung, and *Kow-Loon* twisted without interest, looking in the glass at her shape.

No wind. No sea. A white-hot sky and burnished deeps—a splash! Something gone overboard; Castle, A.B., disturbing birds enjoying siesta. The flutter they made in rising brought Williams to his feet in the cage, his head bare, the umbrella tilted to screen him—on his lips words which the others might not hear; "'How long will it be ere ye make an end of words?' . . . 'The snare is laid for him in the grounds' . . . 'Terror shall make him afraid . . .'"

Then, where just now the birds rose, a great fish rose also, flicked with its tail and dived into the shadows cast by *Kow-Loon*.

The pipes shriller than before gave out a note that trilled.

Afterwards, silence. A change of watches, men passing about and about.

CHAPTER XV

THE LETTER

FOR three days nothing further occurred. A breeze had come in from the east, variable, unstable; sometimes *Kow-Loon* backed and filled, scuppers gurgling for a watch or for an hour, then again came calm. Squalls rushed down to encourage those who still had faith; puffs all round the compass, that the merry game of trimming sail might continue.

So at length they crept through Salayer Strait, found the wind heading them and stretched away on a long board till the islands north of Flores threw their net. Here the crew obtained a "sniff of the mangoes" of which they chattered interminably, life and death forgotten; and contracted a wild longing for certain bananas they swore they saw. Then, back to the north-east trailed *Kow-Loon*, bananas lost with the coming of a steady breeze, till Bouton Passage chained them and they turned south past a maze of coral, staring at cool, surf-washed beaches which made them pray to be there.

They saw lagoons so still they looked like glass—emerald in hue, languorous in the pitiless glare. And about the lagoons were palms bedded in a waist-high jungle of grass; monkeys that chattered and swung from branch to branch, so near it seemed the ship's yards must tangle them. So, sometimes on one tack, sometimes the other, they moved until on the third night, the loom of mountains far on the quarter; no sail in sight, Grey took Madeline and her father to his cabin.

The girl was at once enthusiastic on seeing the picture hanging there at the head of the bunk. "How

perfectly charming. What a splendid pose ! She must be lovely . . . I should just love to know her. No wonder you are proud of her," she cried out.

Grey, a little embarrassed, said, as he had before : "Now you can understand why I couldn't face her without Billee."

"Neither will you if we can keep him safe—and I believe we can."

"How ? " he asked, smiling in spite of his anxiety. But she shook her head, her eyes dancing while the Doctor intervened with : "I should like to handle that sword. Is it yours ? "

"It was my father's," he answered, reaching to take it down, "given him by the Maharajah of Balanpore for saving his life."

"Ah ! the man I have been reading of in your father's journal," he looked sidelong at the Chief and went on : "It is a beauty—probably priceless ; but you should not leave it there. It—it might be stolen . . . or a score of things."

In his mind was a recollection of the Maharajah incident ; another of the sinister figures made by the mad skipper standing there while Billee slept defenceless on the settee. He made no allusion to it. His glance had told him Grey was still overwrought. Instead he asked : "May I see the blade ? "

Handling it presently he, too, became ecstatic. "Marvellous ! What jewel-work ; like everything of that period. I doubt if it could be done now. . . . Jove ! and here is the Wheel of the Law and under it the Buddhist *mantra* to preserve you from the five evils. Really you ought to consider yourself lucky."

"Yet my father owned it and was killed," Grey said quietly.

"In action—while using it?"

"No—strangled while in command and engaged in saving his ship."

"Ah!"

The word fell involuntarily, almost inaudibly, as Challoner faced about, re-sheathed the blade, his gaze sidelong on Grey. "Now why did you not tell me that before?" he asked.

"It's the merest chance I tell you now. As a matter of fact I should not have done so; but you are so kind, both of you, and take so much interest in our affairs, that . . ."

"Without you, my dear Captain, how is my daughter, to say nothing of myself, to reach London again?" He gave the impression of one talking while his brain considered other problems. "Nay, 'dinna fash yooursel', as our little skipper would say; it's give and take in all these matters. We can't do without you, nor can you do without us—so we are just going to see the affair through—right to the end." He paused, his lips pursed.

"And we won't change ships, Dad, will we—even if one comes?" Madeline questioned, certain it was essential.

"Um! What about those dresses?"

"Captain Grey has promised to tell me how he and all the others managed when he was shipwrecked once, and only had sarongs to cut up."

Challoner looked at Grey. "That true, Captain, or just one of the 'chariot-wheel' brand?"

Without waiting for a reply, he went on deliberately,

his eyes twinkling as he watched : " Suppose we get on with our muttons, please. We have to face it—especially this skipper business. From what I have seen I believe he is only intermittently mad—the most dangerous type. They are able to think and they brood on injuries which may or may not have bases in fact. Someone jeered or laughed when passing, we will say ; they store the memory and when the fit takes them again are prepared for vengeance. Of course, there may be a deeper rooted cause, doubtless often there is ; something that has happened in the past, for example . . .

" I need not remind you, Grey, that Williams has very little in common with the Welsh beyond his name—which may not be his. You will admit, as I do, there is dark blood in his veins. He might be an Armenian, but I think it more likely he is Eurasian, the son of an English father and some hill-country woman, Pathan, Afridi, even Afghan, and all these people are known for their blood feuds carried on and on often for generations. . . .

" Well now, you know this also. You have had greater experience of the Punjab than I have, and what I want to get at is, to put it plainly, have you any recollection of meeting him before the Hong-Kong episode ? "

" Not directly. When I am in contact with him something tells me he was on the *Sorisha*. This troubled me so much that one night I pumped my brother ; but the only memory he had was that ' Hairy Johnny ' was substituted for ' Hanging Johnny ' in one of the shanties, because the man did not like the second mate. I fancy Williams was second mate, but I can't tell you his name. It was not Williams ; it is all very vague. Then there is that

expression of his: 'Ba! Ba! Black sheep,' which you heard—and that, too, seems to belong to *Sorisha*. Billee says he heard my mother use it last time he was at home—in connection with some man who had acted like a cad. . . . That is about all I can recall."

"Was Mrs Grey on the *Sorisha* also?" Challoner questioned.

"Yes. We were all there. I was a first-year midshipman, Billee not quite four."

"And your mother is a musician as well as your brother," Challoner mused.

"She plays and sings like an angel," Grey asserted, in ringing content. "Of course Billee gets it from her—no doubt in the world."

He did not explain why he was so emphatic on this; but in his mind the memory of her words assailed him as on that night when he heard her voice: "Him I made of my own flesh, like as two peas with myself—breath for breath; lip and eye and hair and limb as I am and I only . . . one who would inherit my gift of song . . . Poor little Mother!" Grey looked up and caught Challoner's eyes.

"It rather bowls me;" he put it so with a swift throw for cover, crossed to the port and looked out. He came back flushed to one further incident.

"That time when the geyser flared high up and Williams lost his wool, I had him by the arm helping him. He was stuttering with fright. I could scarcely hold him and hailed the man at the wheel for help. He came and we got the skipper to the companion and in a couple of minutes were all three lying in a heap at the bottom of the stairs. . . . How long the struggle went on I don't know; but I recollect the

feel of his hands circling my throat. I shall never forget it. They went for my jugular in a practised way. . . . I don't know how else to express it ; but not as though he didn't know where it was. Graves felt it, too—I'll swear it . . . like a constrictor winding his coils . . . gradually tightening them . . .”

He broke off suddenly, looked at his watch and said : “Jove ! it's time for sights . . . I must go on deck.” He referred to the sun's meridian altitude which is taken each day at noon to fix the ship's latitude and time.

They went up to the poop, Challoner carrying Elgar's sextant, Grey, Cobham and Raffles all presently busy “chasing the sun” which was even nearer the zenith than when Madeline made her success. But to-day they seemed more constrained. The events of the past forty-eight hours and their recent conversation accounted for that—Api, too, they steadily drew near . . . Api which might be angry as Krakatoa.

At length, when it was seen the sun would climb no higher, Grey crossed to the Doctor and said : “I wish I could shut off the whole saloon at the entrance. He's dangerous ; but it would give him too much freedom. He might set fire to the ship and no one would be the wiser. No—I can't afford to run that risk.”

Challoner agreed, and as noon was made on the ship's bell he said quietly : “I must see you presently. Madeline will be lying down after lunch. Shall we say three o'clock ?” And on Grey looking his question, he added : “Yes. I have come to a point where I must ask for help.”

At the appointed hour the two met on the quarter-

deck. A light breeze from the south-east kept the ship steady, her sails asleep. They were heading a little to the north of east, crossing Flores Sea at a long angle towards the reefs lying west of Moro Mahu. To leeward on the port side Williams walked up and down within his cage over which a boat's awning had been spread. He was restless as they had not seen him for days, the Bible closed—yet, so accustomed were they to his vagaries, neither Grey nor the Doctor noticed him. They crossed to the other side and sat beneath the awning almost directly over the cabin which Madeline occupied.

“There is a queer bit of chronological stuff pasted between the last sheets of the journal,” Challoner stated, as he pulled his chair nearer. “You possibly may understand it.”

He opened the volume which was in a loose cover of soft leather and pointed it out. Grey, leaning over to read, said at once: “That is Mums’ handwriting. It was not there last voyage.”

He took it and saw that it was concerned with incidents of his father’s life. At the head of it Mrs Grey had written:

Chronological:

1830.	J. H. Grey	aged 16,	joins H.I.E.C.	as midshipman.
1840.	„	„ 27,	appointed Captain of <i>Kow-Loon</i> .	
1857.	„	„ 43	Harold — Raffles — S.N.	17.
1870.	„ <i>Sorisha</i>	„ 65	„ 13	„ 3 „ 30.
1883.	—	„	26	„ 16 „ 43.

“J. H. Grey,” Challoner remarked, as he saw his companion frowning over this, “I assume was your father?”

"Yes. I think I told you he married late—probably in '57. Raffles and I aren't in the list; but there is this S.N. 17 in the last column . . . what does that refer to?"

"Your mother I inferred. You told me she was but a girl when she married."

"No," Grey said. "My mother's initials were S. L.—She was one of the Irish Lloyds and proud of it. I can't make top or tail of it."

He leaned over, his elbow resting on the arm of his chair, turned the page at hazard and saw in the same hand:

"TO MY DEAR BOYS,—

"An explanation of these dates which I intended to fasten with it, seemed too personal to leave open; so I place it in a sealed packet inside the cover of the journal and so fastened that it cannot be lost or read except by yourself, Harold. I shall pack it and place it where you may see it when you unpack; for I am concerned that sooner or later you will be confronted with statements—perhaps proof of what they call your dear father's villainy—signed sealed, and delivered so that unquestionably it must appear true.

"To you, Harold, I say, do not believe it. It is false. Keep it from Billee if possible. Bring him back to me so that one of those I love may be within call if necessity arises. For you are far from me, Harold, my son, and set upon your career. Billee is less set and I may be able to keep him with me more easily than I can you.

"God bless you both,

"YOUR LOVING MOTHER."

A tense silence followed this reading, then Grey looked across and said: "But there is no packet—have you left it in your cabin?"

"It was not there when you gave me the book. Had it been, as possibly it is bulky, I might have seen it at once."

"Then where is it?"

"That is what we must discover. If you don't mind my saying so, I think it is so important that we *must* find it . . . for, I think, in all probability it will contain the clue to all those troubles which are unconnected with Krakatoa. . . ."

"You mean him?" Grey jerked his thumb to indicate Williams.

"Far-fetched as it appears—yes. He's some kind of half-caste, as we decided just now, probably more Brahmin or Bhuddist than Joss-pidgin in spite of the Comprador. I was near the other day when he was talking, his head beneath the umbrella, and I heard distinctly the words: '*Dèr tang yá!*' repeated many times, which is Persian or Pashtu for 'my cup is full!' I would have spoken of it sooner but you seemed so done I had pity . . ."

Grey listening, his eyes cold and rather stern, said after a pause: "Yes. But what has that to do with—with my mother's statement?"

"May it not explain the strange initials we see in the table?"

"S. N.? It may, of course; but what then?"

"Well—consider, for example, this march of events as shown by the dates."

"Yes?"

"In 1840 your father is appointed Captain of this

ship. He is 27 years of age, unmarried. In 1857 S. N. appears and the figures show that he or she is 17 years of age. But who is S. N. and why are the initials placed in column together with your dates? It may be coincidence . . . but——”

“True,” Grey snapped out. “Naturally I see the suggestion as you do. It’s damnable. But I can’t allow it to lie there. We must prove it—yes or no . . . if only for my father’s sake.”

Challoner leaned nearer, his hand on his friend’s shoulder. “Don’t let it come between us, Grey—I am more sorry than I can express it if I have seemed to put a construction on it which adds to your pain. . . .”

“No—please don’t take that view. Afraid I’m rather on edge . . . but I haven’t lost sight of my mother’s statement that it is false . . . er . . . the age set down in the last column seems to point to your Pathan-Parsee, too.”

“I should have given him another decade. However, it is near enough,” Challoner decided, “to give us an appetite for further links. Can it be done?”

“At once if you urge it.”

“You still don’t quite like it?”

“I dislike any stirring in muddy waters. I can’t pretend to like it.”

“But if your brother’s safety is at stake—and personally I think that is the implication—you will not prohibit it?”

“God! No. If I admitted that I should be harbouring . . .” He did not say what, but remained staring out at the sea which together in the old days they had loved.

"What I want to point out is that if our Pathan-
Parsee happens to be the individual Mrs Grey suggests,
he may have *his* point of view and believe it as firmly
as you believe yours."

"Afraid I'm out of my depth, Doctor," Grey waived.

"Let me put it this way. . . . If your father
married as he may easily have done in India in 1840,
he may have had a son or daughter in 1841 who now
that your father is dead may be interested in his
estate. . . ."

"But in that case surely my father would have
told us?"

"Not necessarily. He may have told Mrs Grey.
Probably from what she says he did tell her; but you
and your brother, no. He died suddenly, remember,
when you two were but children. I don't think,
therefore, he would be likely to talk to you of what
may have happened nearly thirty years earlier. You
see that?"

"I should be blind if I did not. Right! I agree.
We will go down and search his cabin. I have a key.
Can you come now?"

"I think we had better use our opportunity; for
presently my daughter will be on deck and then it
will be less easy."

"Raffles, too," Grey acknowledged—crossed to give
orders to the officer of the watch before joining
Challoner at the companion.

It was half-past four, Billee already on duty when
the two emerged, hot and on edge, and entered the
Chief's cabin. They sat down as the steward came in
with tea and set it before them.

They took it rather solemnly and in silence till Challoner suggested it would be wise to keep the matter between themselves at present.

"Definitely," Grey answered.

"Just so."

The Chief produced cheroots which they lighted.

After an interval Challoner spoke again: "By the way, where did you keep that journal?"

"My father's? Up there with my other books. I got it out the last time I was in Hong-Kong. I put it there to read—but there's been no chance."

Challoner had no comment to make and presently as they went on deck Grey said: "Of course it was asking for trouble; but——"

He might have been more explanatory now he was smoking; however, Madeline came up at that moment to say in her vivacious manner that she had been trying to darn stockings with a pin, and "had anybody any needles? for the pin had swelled head and wouldn't work."

That made Grey smile and remove his cheroot to say: "Sails has some and Billee may have. Shall I see?"

"Not specially at this minute, please, for I have no mending. Billee said there might be some in the slop-chest. What is a slop-chest?"

"The store cupboard where we keep clothes and all sorts of Gillguys for the men; but there won't be anything there to mend stockings."

"Then what do you do when there's a hole?"

"Sew on a patch or put in a rivet, Miss Challoner. Sails does the patching, Chips the riveting."

"And I have been trying to sew with a pin. Really,

Captain Grey, ships are not very up-to-date, are they ?”

“Mm—no. I suppose that’s why they call us shellbacks.”

After that, in spite of the gravity of the situation, smiles and laughter ran in double harness for all the time the girl remained on deck.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN

GREY, reclining in the long cane lounge he used at night, was presently aware of Madeline's presence. She had come round as on other nights and was peeping, tip-toeing to see whether he slept. He rose at once in spite of her entreaty: "You looked so comfortable, please stay there," she begged.

"Until midnight," he told her, "I am on duty in case my brother needs help. You see he is only sixteen and a bit—rather young to be officer of the watch! Do stay."

As a matter of fact he was glad of the diversion, for his mind was troubled by this new issue; troubled by their lack of success, by the enigma which seemed to surround his family and kept him guessing, as he put it.

"What have you been doing to your praying-wheel, Captain Grey?" she asked without preface.

"When we are outside, clear of all these islands, I will tell you," he said. "I daren't here. Meanwhile it's too hot to walk. Let me get you a chair."

He found one and returned dragging it after him. "There. Now if you will sit and say '*j'y suis j'y reste*' as you did when we first met . . ."

"And you had sticking-plaster on your face," she interjected.

". . . I will obey you and do the same," he replied, but with no smile to liven it.

"Not if you are going to be grumpy," she cut back swift and sure in her return. Then, leaning nearer: "It was rather cheek, wasn't it? Especially *j'y reste*

when all my clothes were burnt. Tell me what I am to do."

"Well—in my case when I was wrecked and pitched ashore where there were no shops . . ." he commenced, then paused uncertain.

"Yes?"

"But I'm afraid you couldn't."

"I could try. What was it, please?"

"You see it was a tiny bit of a jungle village where the people didn't wear much. But they had sarongs and a spare blanket or so which they gave us. So my pal and I cut them and made suits. They were a decent crowd—all except the betel nut—Malays, you know."

"But how could you manage without patterns?"

"Oh, we just spread it out on the beach and took turns to . . . well, as a matter of fact, I lay down on it while my pal chalked a line all round me with a bit of burnt stick. Then he lay down and I did the same for him. After that all we had to do was cut out and sew the pieces together."

"Mm—yes," she smiled. "Rather primitive, Captain Grey. But the blanket notion is good. I must beg one or two if we don't meet a mailboat, and see what I can do. *J'y suis, j'y reste*—yes, it was cheek."

"You won me over with it," he said in a new tone, "otherwise I should not have invented that quibble about Macassar. . . ."

"Was it a quibble?" she asked swiftly.

"I suppose we could have got there," he said, "but I could see you didn't want to. . . . Really you looked so jolly and refreshing after all you had gone

through—so don't-care and confident when I was feeling whipped and suspicious of every new turn of the wheel. . . ."

"The praying-wheel?" she asked, evading reminiscence, "or just fate?"

"Fate . . . er . . . the other had not come in then—at all events as far as I was concerned."

She noticed his eyes harden as he said it and again put in swiftly: "Oh! but you don't really credit it. You couldn't——"

"I don't know. When I am talking to you I don't. It's curious how bothers twist one. All my teaching and instincts lead me to believe that men are masters of their own destiny—yet consider what has happened this trip: a mad skipper and, and the earthquakes, five or six hands gone . . . this dead set on my brother—one is inclined to damn the bonze for his interference with what once was an orderly ship, sane in all her movements . . ."

"What bonze . . . please? I haven't met him before," she complained, looking up at him, wistfully striving to bring him back. But laughter was out of court.

"The one who stood over poor old *Kow-Loon* when she was my father's ship and said: '*Om! Mani padme, hum*' without I swear intending any harm, and got them to carve it on her escutcheon."

"What did it mean?"

He waived this with: "Everything to the Buddhist. It is the holy invocation, the 'Hail! Mary' of the Buddhist faith: the mystic six syllables which influence the six stages of reincarnation through which all must pass. . . ."

"But *you* don't believe that if you believe man is master of his own destiny . . . you can't."

"There are so many queer things possible," he explained, "in these Eastern lands. Suppose, for instance, when the bonze tried to bless her, or help her with her reincarnation, someone who hated her, or hated some of the folk who were on board, turned his praying-wheel the wrong way, the blessing would become a curse, her success would for ever after be disaster. . . . Oh! I know it sounds odd, stupid even to talk of these things seriously; but if you have been brought up among these people and have got even a small inkling of their belief, you know what they mean when they say a thing, and are more or less influenced by it. I mean influenced even against your will, or your belief. . . ."

"I sometimes wonder, as I remember all that has happened since my father died, if in some way this ship is not identified with him. He was one of those who helped to fashion her, ordered the sacred *mantra* to be set up there at the break of the poop—and remember there are others who have a similar power, for although *Kow-Loon* is safe, she can be made unsafe . . . drawn into the net . . . I don't know how else to put it . . ."

"This ship—*Kow-Loon*?" she interjected.

"Yes. Why not? This is the East. The *mantra* of the East is set upon her, the Wheel of Life which is above it moves. Your father and I have been using our knives, scraping away accumulated coats of varnish and have found it. And it was all put there either as a freak of the bonze, or perhaps by order of the Lord Buddha himself. . . ."

"That sounds as though I mocked, doesn't it?" He leaned forward tapping the arm of his chair. "Well, but I don't, for I have lived nearly all my life out here and I never mock at what I do not understand. You see I was born in Rangoon within sound of the gongs at Shwe Dagon, my brother in Calcutta, so from the beginning we have been mixed up with mysticism and fatalism. Some of it has stuck, I suppose. I never paid much attention to it till recently, and then it was forced upon me by my mother's message, which your father explains is telepathy."

He shrugged it out and again leaned back speaking earnestly: "I had never heard of telepathy; but we have been in contact with fatalism, in temples, in forests, lakes and rivers; amidst ruins, on the praying-wheel . . . even at the Towers of Silence, so you can't be surprised if one considers it part of life, death and the beyond. . . . One can't avoid it. It creeps in when you are not thinking and always comes laden with incense and the tinkle of bells . . . seductive. Of course it pleases you, just as the smell of joss-sticks or camphor-wood chests pleases . . . but"—his voice fell away so that she could scarcely hear the words—"but the trouble is that all this seduction and the determination to fight it centre round my brother . . . and sometimes I feel they will win; that fighting is of no use. . . ."

"Of course, if you allow yourself to come under the influence," she began, but he pushed that off.

"Never. Never; yet for all that the suggestion is there. Where does it come from? Who puts it? Did someone turn the wheel the wrong way? Was Shaitan in league with the bonze? . . . Why should

he be; or is there something nearer not mystical, close at hand? . . .” He got up, walked to the rail, looked over and came back, his eyes tired, the stress obvious. “It rather bothers me,” he added.

To turn him she said: “I saw you walking with your brother just now. You are awfully good pals, aren’t you?”

“Billee and I? Oh, yes. You see since my father died I have more or less taken his place. Krakatoa and other things have rather shaken him. It makes me anxious when I think of the warnings. . . . I couldn’t afford to lose Billee. I couldn’t go back to Mums without him.”

“You will not,” she said, speaking with the absolute confidence of youth and sympathetic feeling. “You will go back with him and leave him with her so that he may go on with his music. I have faith—but it is not quite the same as yours and it tells me that we may trust in God . . . that praying-wheels and *mantras* don’t matter. That nothing matters but just trust . . . and fighting. . . .”

He leaned forward and pressed her hand. “You give me strength,” he said. “I shan’t forget.”

“And we have to pass Api,” she mused.

“Api won’t hurt us if we have a breeze,” he said to reassure her. “We have lots of sea-room there so I shall give him a wide berth.” He shivered as he said it, yet he did not touch wood, nor dream of exorcism as is the modern method.

“I shall come to you for the blankets,” she smiled, “when Api is astern. . . . By the way, when are you going to let Dad begin taking his watch? He has nothing to do and would love it.”

"We decided it would be better to start when we are clear of the land, Miss Challoner."

"I know. He told me that, but there is the mad skipper; can't he help in that?"

"If he broke out it would be dangerous," he objected.

"Please do," she begged, her eyes pleading; "the greater the danger the more need of help."

"It will keep you on tenter-hooks," he protested, watching her sweet face, stirred yet still.

"We are on tenter-hooks in any case, surely?"

"Yes—I should be blind not to see that. Well—we will talk about it. I shall see him presently. . . . That do?"

She thanked him, smiling, her beautiful eyes radiant. Very shortly after she went down, and Grey sitting in his chair dozed, spoke as he had been speaking with one who pleaded for strength and trust in the God of his fathers . . . who did not withdraw her hand when he clasped it; nor, when presently, in his sleep, it seemed he pressed it to his lips, make any great outcry at the sacrilege. . . .

A tremor ran through the ship, in the old way, jarring spars and masts and boats—some of these lying turned bottom-up just beyond on the skids. Jarred, as long ago, when it had sent glasses jingling across the tray in a cabin where a pragmatic lieutenant discoursed affably, yet with a wonderful feeling of the probable fate of his wife and child—adding, "*Possible—Nicht wahr?*" listening the while. . . .

Grey stirred instantly, sat up, stared about and about . . . saw the sails towering aloft, glinting in

moonlight . . . soft as down . . . saw Billee halted, listening—coming swiftly near to speak . . . dead-lights still aglow over the skipper's cabin and decided at once what he must do. . . .

With a vast pretence of indifference, stretching with extended arms, yawning, he rose and asked the hour.

"Just six bells, sir. . . . Did you feel it?" Billee asked. But here he referred to the tremor and not to the hour.

Grey linked arms, saying casually: "The old thing, Billee . . . better be here than ashore, eh?" Then swiftly, lest he should betray what he felt but did not yet understand, added: "The old man reads late. I think I will take a look round down there," he indicated the cabin. "If you want me for anything whistle down the voice pipe . . . and if I want anything I will do the same. One blast. . . ."

Then he entered the companion and went deliberately to visit Moloch—the god to whom *Kow-Loon* made sacrifice lest greater evil fell and men died of it. He went without premeditation or plan, stirred by that strange seismographic sense which is at once devastating and exacting, to discover how Moloch fared now that he was alone with terror. He crossed over to where the sentry ambled sleepily at his post, alert at the sound to greet him with the essential salute, said briefly: "Unlash the bar and take it down," assisted, unlocked the door and stood in the gap it made when open.

On the deck, kneeling on a praying-mat, his face turned towards the East, Shâhdara Williams bowed, quaking, with his forehead on the deck, obeying the instinct which bids men pray when fear holds them.

On his head was a scarf red and orange upon cream, twisted into the form of a turban, on his feet white socks, about his shoulders and trailing to below his knees a yellow robe which may have been his when a Joss-pidgin.

He took no notice of Grey's entrance, but continued to salaam, muttering phrases which may have been in any known dialect, so mumbled were the words, so swift their roll. Grey closed the door behind him and stood waiting, acknowledging tacitly the right of all men to their prayers. It was a scene to which long ago he had become accustomed, differing from the Hindoo, or Moslem; but in what particulars he did not consider. As a matter of fact he was so amazed he scarcely had thought for anything but surprise—surprise in the sense that he was compelled to watch, turning over and over in his mind the various terminals he had gathered of this stranger's identity. Meanwhile, to baffle him, over and over rang the old *Sorisha* motif, the old jubilation that at length he was face to face with the mystery of his father's death.

He did not know he was strung taut by the same influence that compelled Williams to grovel on his knees before shadows which came only from the distaff side of his being. What he recognized indeed was more to the point if he would resolve the motif now that it rang. Still he waited. Alive with intuition he waited, watching the long-drawn prayer of his enemy.

At length Williams rose, rolled his mat, took off his turban—thrust feet into slippers and turned to face Grey. The man's eyes were wild, his teeth castanetting.

"I called not, neither did I pray to gods you know," he said, still in the sing-song voice with which he had mumbled prayers. "Yet you are here to upbraid! Be advised. Let the dead lie dead. If I had dreamed in my life I might meet you I would have gone to the end of the world to escape—now that I am a Man of Peace. Do you suppose I am still *Talib-ul-Ila*, the Mullah who stirs up mischief for the sake of mischief? Go away! I am weary and the sea quakes under us seeking the dust for which you searched at the beginning of sorrows."

Grey listened, sure of his ground—saying in his mind of the man's attitude and abasement as he stood fumbling with words—"drabh!" his mother's phrase, and aloud: "You were on *Sorisha* that night when the typhoon drove us back upon Carimata and my father was found dead upon the lashing which held him to the rigging. I was but a boy at the time, but I know you . . ."

"*Sorisha!*" The name came with a snarl, yet he made no stir proximate to its intensity. He seemed to shrink, his jaw dropped and in a miserable whine he said: "If I be wicked woe unto me, and if I be righteous yet will I not lift up my head; I am full of confusion, therefore see thou my confusion! . . ."

The ship jarred to a tremor and he ceased, his eyes scared. He began to walk feebly to and fro as it passed, listening, intent; his gaze bent now on Grey, now on the port whence moonbeams entered drawing faintly upon the deck a pattern of the grating Grey had fixed. The music of the sea came up to them cajoling, full of soft rills, then suddenly the man stood.

"Who did this deed you tell of?" he asked, and sat in a bunch, huddled against the settee, pulling at the white trousers he wore, covering his socks.

"You did it," Grey answered, watching, alert to every move.

But Williams made none. He appeared to have forgotten alike his sock and the question he had asked. He half turned and muttered: "It is late and I am weary. Go! Let the dead lie dead . . . what have I to do with the dead, or with you? Is it not enough that I am chained and in prison? *Dèr tang yá!* I say to you that! As she said it." His voice fell away, plaintive, sorrowful. "When she pointed calling to those who laughed—'Ba! Ba! Black sheep,' with the voice of one who sings. . . . Go away . . . the moon is near to full—and I—I swim in dreams."

Grey came close, speaking in low, stern accents, the reference which he could not mistake setting him aflame: "In chains . . . At the end of a rope—yes. I promise it! I promise it! Listen! I have something to tell you. We are drawing near Timor. I have chosen to reach the Indian Ocean between Ombia and Timor. On Timor are two towns, one Dutch, the other Portuguese. I have decided to put in at one or the other. I shall hand you over to the Governor and have you sent thence to England where I shall meet you and you will hang."

Williams, with his head supported by cupped hands, his beard thrust forward, said under his breath: "Ba! Ba! Black sheep," and again, sibilant, almost in a whisper: "Twelve annas to the rupee—— Ssst!" turned sidelong and closed his eyes, "so she said."

Grey crossed and opened the cabin door, beckoned

the guard and returning with them ordered : " Seize him—quick ! Before he moves."

And as they obeyed, stooped and lifted the trouser leg Williams had pulled down. Again he stood erect, saying : " The Afridis carry a knife down there. I thought I saw one. My apologies, *Talib-ul-Ila*, you doubtless understand knives are taboo."

They went out. It was not a knife Grey had seen. It was a package with one red seal obtruding beyond the sock.

In the interval the madman had removed it.

CHAPTER XVII

"ERL-KING"

GREY called a council of war the next day before Williams was brought to his cage. There were present young Cobham, eager as always to push home the fight; Raffles, Challoner and Madeline. Standing with his back to the poop capstan Grey faced his audience with a proposition born of the exasperation which came upon him while in Williams' cabin last night.

"I don't feel justified in continuing to run this risk," he said. "I have been looking at my charts and I find the straits leading to the Indian Ocean hereabouts are dangerously narrow and in some cases full of reefs. I should not care to navigate either of them in a sailing ship unless I had a full crew and large-scale charts.

"I was in the skipper's cabin last night. I caught him at his prayers rigged up in turban and yellow robe—some sort of praying kit and in a state of mortal funk because of the quake. I'm afraid I lost my temper over him; anyhow, I told him I should put him ashore either at Kupang or Dilhi, and have him sent home for trial . . . I told him why he would be tried, and I don't regret having done so. If it scares him and he jumps overboard before we reach Timor so much the better, I shall not weep. Trials are not in my text-books. I don't know anything about them; but for all that I should like to see him facing the music. Also," he went on, "I daresay we shall be able to pick up a few men—especially at Kupang. We shall want them when we get down south."

During the first dog watch with Challoner and

Madeline in his cabin, Grey explained more fully what had occurred last night. How it had ended, too, leaving Grey conscious as on other occasions, that no matter how strenuously he piped, the mad skipper called the tune.

“I ought to have searched him then,” he said, “he had no time to move—he may have been sitting on it while I fooled.”

It was then Challoner made a suggestion which seemed to promise results and Grey decided it might be tried. “You will have to give me *carte-blanche* as to patter,” Challoner said as they lighted cheroots and went on deck.

Outside they parted, Grey to walk up and down the quarter-deck, Challoner to mount the poop ladder. At the top he stood looking about for a chair, saw one and returned presently dragging it with him to a spot just abaft the cage; sat and leaned back to enjoy his cigar. Williams upon his low seat and propped against the rail nursing his Bible, tilted the umbrella and looked at the intruder.

As he made no remark Challoner produced his cigar-case and leaned forward offering it. “Rather dull, Captain, isn’t it? Care for a smoke?” he asked.

Williams twisted to stare from beneath the umbrella, seemed to hesitate, then frowned a refusal.

Challoner bowed, replaced his case and said: “My mistake. I’m sorry. Smoking rather helps to pass the time. As a matter of fact, as the aroma from mine doubtless drifts your way it seemed only courteous to give you the opportunity.”

Williams had no comment to offer. He glowered, let

the umbrella again screen him and returned to the Bible. He was busily engaged turning leaves to an undercurrent of texts when Grey came up the ladder and paused at the top of it to say :

"By the way, Doctor Challoner—I would rather you sat farther aft, or on the other side . . . in fact anywhere but there. And, please, do not interfere with the prisoner."

Challoner rose at once, dragged the chair away, apologizing as he did so with : "The poor devil looked so glum, Captain, I'm afraid I was indiscreet. Thank you for putting it so nicely."

Grey took no notice of this beyond a rather curt : "Oh! That's all right," walked aft, looked into the compass, spoke to Billee and went down by the companion.

Half an hour passed. Challoner finished his cheroot, flung the stump overboard and commenced to walk. Slowly he approached the cage, glanced round and said so that Williams could not fail to hear :

"Why do they keep you here?" Sauntered past, obtained no reply; came back again, and again as he drew close said : "I suppose they think you are not safe as you strangled that *chowkidar* (watchman), is that it?"

He walked on, negligent in attitude, came back but received no answer, turned and said very distinctly : "And they stole some papers; a packet in the handwriting of the *memsahib*, whom you loved because of the song—papers which were yours . . ."

He waited this time apparently careless of Grey's order. The skipper staring sidelong, nodding many times, saying under his breath : "Yes . . . not my

memsahib. She belong him. Chief (Grey) *chaubak serai** . . . He steal um back. . . .”

“And so you kill the *chowkidar*, eh?”

Williams did not see eye to eye with this; he grunted disapproval.”

“No?” Challoner acknowledged, “perhaps you are right and I am wrong.” Then very clearly, as he leaned over the sitting man: “Perhaps I can persuade the Chief to return the papers. Probably he did not know they were yours. I will go now.”

With that he left the poop and went down to see Grey. “Luck of a sort,” he said at once. “He thinks you have them. It’s quite possible he has forgotten where he placed them.”

“Then we must go on looking. I wonder if he smelt a rat?”

“It’s possible, of course.”

They had not found them when a violent tremor called them on deck, their keenness dulled by lack of success.

At sunset Grey was still on duty though the leading wind held. To windward Williams crouched, the umbrella like a mushroom to cover him. To leeward Raffles on the look out for Api—which it was just possible darkness would reveal, if Api were in eruption. The tremors they had experienced during the past thirty-six hours seemed to point to activity somewhere. Again towards three bells the roar of an explosion, dim, muffled by distance, had followed Grey’s return from the cabin with Challoner. Since, there had been peace, the breeze had freshened, the awnings were

* A smart fellow.

rolled up and Grey in his chair was free to speculate on the similarity between Williams and *Sorisha's* second mate, or to consider fatalism in relation say to the law of storms.

The men were all keyed up, the watch alive to the fact that "another of them volcanoes" still lay in their track and might be seen at any moment. The trouble which had arisen among them which Challoner termed the *noli me tangere* attitude was dead of inanition. Word had gone round that the old man was to be put ashore. "Chokee" was to be his home, while they with new mates, fresh from a queer place called Kupang, would foot it yet in London with the gells. So be it! Let her rip!

And with darkness came the bell-signal they had awaited. Right ahead, it was. Nearly on end.

"Got it, sir," Raffles called, moving to meet his brother.

"Good." Grey stood beside him using glasses. "It's Api right enough. Nearly two hundred miles off though and busy as when I last saw him."

As night closed in the flare became plain. High up it glowed, tinging the heavens—a light which would serve as a beacon for *Kow-Loon* as once it had served for *Assaye*.

Grey did not return immediately to his lounge. The voice of the mad skipper came to him from his corner beside the poop ladder, keeping him as he said on tenter-hooks. Beneath the umbrella he sat chewing the cud of what he had read while daylight held. If a man were quite mad, Grey thought, how was it possible? It implied not only memory, but concentra-

tion of purpose. The drone of his voice went on interminably, an irritant to those who heard. Words fell which showed he imagined he talked with the Almighty. His voice was clear; not as when he raved at those who held him; put him in irons or strait-jacket. His faculties were alert, his argument mystical. It was like an incantation, monotonous—inexpressibly sad. So sad was it Grey felt strangely in sympathy with the man, and could not put from his mind the malady from which he suffered. That he was Eurasian scarcely affected the issue. Challoner believed clearly enough there was some bond between them. Grey questioned it yet acknowledged it was possible. When he considered it the argument moved in a circle.

The incantation droned on. Grey scarcely noted it as he puzzled over the riddle known as madness, until he caught the words which always fell with a singular cadence: “ ‘ Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence. . . . If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there!’ There! God! God! God! as in Carimata Strait . . . ”

Grey listened unashamed, startled at the transition from sorrow to hate: “ Who made thee a judge over us? My cup is full . . . and the *chowkidar* is dead! Who can forever keep watch on his deeds? You? *Dèr tang yá!* Besides, the man gave back hate for hate. Ba! Ba! Black sheep!” He spat it out, venom sudden on his tongue. “ Because of my youth he hated me. While I in her presence was blind and knew not wisdom.” He seemed to shudder in the darkness of his cage. “ The Ship of Sorrows! My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me? ”

Grey shivered, listening intent . . .

What was at the back of it all? Who hated him? And why that singular line from the children's nursery? Many times he used it. It must point surely to some crucial moment in his life when the Gods were asleep and passion alone supreme.

Piecing together fragments from this man's lapses had a strange effect on Grey. Often he strove to shut down, as he expressed it, to stop thinking, and was powerless to command his brain. But now, with an effort he tore himself away, reached solitude farther aft, and lifting eyes to the sails caught sight of the splendid constellation of the Southern Cross, low down in the violet depths. For a moment that steadied him and he passed on till he reached his brother who was on duty and said :

"There's something in the air to-night, Billee . . . mesmeric, electric, volcanic—Api or the drone of that man's prayers. Go down and play, open the ports and skylight and give me the *Moonlight Sonata*! I will keep your watch."

And for the best part of an hour Raffles made music as he did in the old days before Downes was laid at rest in Carimata Strait. The Challoners came up and joined Grey. They sat right aft the helmsman, their neighbour grinding out his trick at the wheel. Then a squall rose with a flick of rain and Raffles returned, the Challoners went down and Grey was alone again—restless, aware of the mad skipper crouched over there dreeing his weird while Api tossed gold dust upon the night.

Api!

He came back from the stealthy rhythm of that

solemn masterpiece to the pulse and crash of a volcano standing amidst the sea, and the frothy mutterings of one who perhaps had slain his father. Came back to it and instantly was immersed in it, throbbing, not with fear or passion, not with frayed nerves, but as an instrument throbs under the hand of a master. Unconscious of it, careless of it as a child is careless of danger.

And the magician who wrought alike on Grey and Williams was Api—a volcano more stable than some, more active just now ; yet, when all was said, merely a vent that pressure might be relieved when the world was in travail.

This he understood as he understood the mystery of the stars, sun, moon ; how to use them so that they would tell him where the winds had placed his ship when no land was present to guide him ; but this drawn-out agony of madness he did not understand, nor had any desire to understand. It dabbled in words which spoke of predestination. Over there in his cage Williams talked of it and the drone came up to Grey making him angry. The man was dabbling in nostrums which long ago this Chief who had usurped command decided were witch-talk, and now at this moment damned.

Quite true. Yet just then talk of that quality was calculated to make plain men swear. Apparently Api was the instrument prepared to avenge God’s wrath on . . . whom—Grey ? the ship, flaunting so bravely the heroics of another creed ? or the Challoners ? the crew, perchance who forgot logic and expected to find promises made two years ago still binding in the East India Dock Road . . . !

Yet God existed, ruled, ordered the smooth progress of the years for all time. In a world where the stupendous forces of nature are arrayed against man, no sailor would dare to shut out God. Without trust in God, Grey knew that he would not be able to face his task. Man must look to some power greater than his own or go mad. Negation would not help him, predestination could not . . . well, and after all, what was it but a stupid hypothesis prepared by man to shift the burden of responsibility to the Almighty?

Swayed by cross-currents as never before Grey walked the deck while Raffles was below bending over the charts. Then, insidiously, from some unknown cell, came a thought which brought him low. "But your mother's warning—how escape it? Do you suppose she did not know? . . . Is it not possible that her love for her sons enabled her to talk with God, learn His mysteries and pass them in warning messages through space?

Singular, is it not, how thoughts come? Grey did not consider this; he halted like one suddenly faced with definite proof—and rejected it, "Nonsense!" the one word on his lips. He pronounced it so distinctly, it startled him and he walked again. How could he be sure it was nonsense? Could he prove it? Pish! Were they not free, slipping along before a breeze that carried them hourly nearer that goal of his; the pukka ocean which for centuries had been navigated by men in dug-out canoes, coracles, vessels flimsy as the basket which held Moses on the Nile. They had sailed there . . . Then why . . . ?

From the fo’c’sle head where the men were gathered came the sentimental end of a song which told what happened to the girl’s lover when he crossed the blue sea, but it sufficed. Grey nearly smiled.

In truth the burden he bore reacting on a mind steeped in imagery drove Grey to attempt analysis of matters which are of the spirit and therefore beyond analysis. And as he walked to and fro listening to the jingle, Raffles reappeared with information gleaned from certain angles he had projected on the chart. “It puts us thirty-three miles south-west of the line of reefs, sir, between Kaka and Moro Mahu. . . .”

“Good. Approximately what I expected. I will look it over when I go down.” He found his whistle and blew a call, instantly master of himself and all who obeyed his commands.

The bosun arrived at the head of the ladder, saluting in answer—Grey’s arm swept a small segment of the poop deck. He did not speak. Again came the salute as the bosun with two men moved over to the mad skipper’s corner. “Beg pardon, sir. Three bells (7.30 p.m.) has per usual.”

The gourd-like top which hid the man stirred and he rose. The guard accepted the gourd, closed it and one carried it while all stepped out going towards the companion. Williams walked in their midst, his arms held by the strait-jacket. He talked volubly and excitedly of a “visitation” which apparently had disturbed him while he sat searching out texts. “In six days,” he said harshly, “God made Heaven and Earth and all that is therein . . . but this I saw was of the devil’s fashioning— Permitted by the Most High to warn us that the end is at hand. Hence come

tears and lamentations, and hence, too, it becomes necessary to act as the Lord God ordains. . . .”

Mad? No cohesion anywhere, Grey thought, his mind on what had passed just now. The Bosun had no two opinions on it. “Balmy has per usual,” was *his* definition of the thing. Then he became aware the skipper, as they still called him, was glowering at Raffles who stood near the binnacle.

“Who is that young man?” he asked. “I seem to know . . . somewhere long ago.” He held back, standing at the head of the stairs, his eyes fixed, his form quaking. “We fell down there. Fighting . . . From the first we fought even until the end!” He seemed to draw himself up, his voice rose: “But the end was not yet. . . . Thus saith the Lord God, immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from Heaven and the power of the Heavens shall be shaken . . .”

The Chief, standing not far from the rail noting the skipper’s attitude, cried out: “Get him along, bosun, and if he continues as he is, keep the strait-jacket on.” He came near in case of necessity, and Williams, facing about instantly, caught a gleam from Api as it tossed gold dust in the sky. For a moment it distracted him and he leaned forward with bowed head; his swathed form mummy-like and sinister in the gloom.

“Again there is fire, O ye of little faith! You—who are like him who fought—— Prepare! Be ye also ready—‘for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh——’”

Bosun and guard gripped him so that he went down noisily to rest.

Grey turned and took his brother's arm, drawing him away for the boy was sensitive and easily disturbed.

"Just as I was beginning to be sorry for the poor devil," he tossed out, "though why, as he has his knife into you, I can't understand. Pity you ever came to sea, Billee. You are wasted here—why didn't you wait till I got home?"

"Because I was afraid you'd stop me."

"True. It's in the blood—ours, anyhow."

"Are you sorry I came, Harold?"

"Yes—seeing what I see now. What is the use of being able to play Bach at sea? It won't amuse shell-backs. They prefer things with a tune . . . er . . . and there's something uncanny going on this voyage. By the way, I don't think I ever told you, but father died in Carimata Strait . . . and—and we buried poor old Downes quite near where he lies."

"I know. Mums told me about Dad before we sailed. He had Java fever, like Downes had."

Grey struck a match and lighting a cheroot glanced sidelong at his brother. "Was she trying to persuade you to stay at home and take up music?" he asked, having learned what he sought.

"No, I don't think so . . . and now Williams is mad. Will he die too? Is there any connection between them? And has it anything to do with . . . with . . ."

"None in the world, dear old boy. Certainly not in Williams' case. We are up against an earthquake period—that's all. . . . Why the man was mad when he joined! Remember his umbrella, and his blessing as he stood on the gangway: 'A man may be of the

Elect,' " he mimicked, " ' yet fail to win the hearts of those he commands.' Mad ! I tell you—and some of the shore gang knew it."

" But Mums, Harold, could she know it ? " he asked, coming nearer.

Again Grey looked sidelong at his brother, read anxiety in the dark, sensitive eyes, and said : " No. Impossible."

Raffles faced the sea, seeing nothing of it as his brother knew. " But if she can make us hear things, why is it impossible for her to know what we do ? "

" I don't believe she can. We heard because she was in trouble about your coming to sea. She thinks you are wasting your time. So do I, Billee . . . and we . . . Oh ! what's the use ? Talk of the ship—she's pukka, the sea—quite all right for sailors, people who can't do anything else ; but for chaps who can play as you can it's sheer fooling. . . . Earthquakes don't happen every day, you know. You've had more than your share of them . . . so have I . . . yet——"

" Is that what worries you ? " Raffles interjected, his hand on Harold's shoulder.

" No."

" Nor the *Erl-King* ? "

" No—I'd forgotten it."

Grey lied and knew that he lied. He stood puffing at his cheroot acknowledging it was necessary. The boy was sensitive as a girl. Lord ! what a pity to spoil it by sailing—make him coarse and hard. He stared up at the sails wondering what to say. The breeze held them asleep against cloudless heavens. Stars as large as planets pricked the blue. Some

appeared amidst the rigging, climbing and falling as the ship lazily swayed.

"And yet," said Raffles after a pause, "I heard it playing when I was turned in."

"You did! To-night?"

"Yes—just like I did in Hong-Kong that time."

"Were you awake or asleep?" Grey asked, his brain alert, his words slow.

"Asleep, I think, when it began, but it went on after I awoke. I loved to hear it. Those galloping octaves always made me creep when Mums played them. So I lay still . . . and the creeps came all right. I wonder if *she* would hear if I played it, Harold? If *we* can, why shouldn't she? I'd like to try . . . she could tell us when we get home. . . ." He glanced about him expectant, perhaps oppressed by the chill that ran down his spine with the question.

"Impossible!" Grey blurted, because he wished to divert his brother and because in the mood that was upon him he feared rather the mystery that put them in touch than the mystery itself. He had heard the music. There was no doubt about that. He had talked with his mother, yet to admit his brother's suggestion was like offering a challenge to the truth.

Raffles scarcely considered the answer and again pleaded: "But if *we* can hear why couldn't Mums?"

In his anxiety to avoid this Grey said: "I don't think you would understand, dear old boy, if I explained—first because I know so little about it . . . and because it would take a long time." He put his hand affectionately on his brother's shoulder and drew him nearer. "You see there are influences, as I call them, which have to do with the stars and theosophy.

Some people are supposed to be able to see behind the veil and to foretell what will happen by using this power. I think they lie. I don't believe anyone can say what is going to happen . . . and I think we should all be scared out of our wits if we could. . . ."

"Yes—but Mums, Harold. *She* wouldn't try to foretell or whatever it is, would she?"

"You know she wouldn't."

"Then let me play it, Harold. It's hateful without music. I want to see if she can hear as you and I can. How could that hurt anybody?"

"It couldn't, Billee-boy. It isn't that . . . and I'm not able to explain what it is. Play if you like."

"You won't hate it if I do?" he begged, still clinging.

"Not I—I love it too well . . . watch that squall."

Raffles moved to the break of the poop, whistled and gave the order: "Stand by halliards fore and aft!"

Kow-Loon bent to it and sneezed through in the old way, going straight for *Api*. Grey might have gone below when it had passed, yet he stayed. There was nothing to note but the wet decks which presently would sizzle in the glare of a new day. His thoughts did not touch this, they were far off with that mother who was able to send messages warning him; perhaps knew of his unrest. He could not have explained these mysteries even to Raffles who walked alone, keeping watch. Presently he lay back in his chair—possibly he dozed.

Again a tremor passed under them and the ship jarred response.

Grey was alert instantly his eyes on the sails but conscious of some peril which perhaps might threaten Raffles.

As a matter of fact the boy called to him : " Right—here ! " Grey's voice was unsteady. He leaned forward gathering impressions—breeze fresh, moonlight on the spars. " That the first ? " he asked. Yes—well, you know what it is ? "

" Yes ; but I thought I must call you in any case. "

" Quite right. What time is it ? "

" Seven bells, sir. "

" Um ! and we're getting in touch with Api, Billee-boy . . . but he can't hurt us while the wind holds. " To reassure him he went on lightly : " In three days we shall have Api astern and be entering the narrows if we carry this breeze. In six or seven we ought to be free of the old man and heading away for the Cape—and I shall be able to get a square sleep. I want it. . . . Right, when Cobham comes up take my bunk and turn in properly. I shall stay here—skipper's prerogative, you know—anyhow I shall be here if it's only for the same reason that ' Boney went to Moscow. ' "

His voice had a queer ring in spite of the jocular touch. Raffles scarcely understood why. Harold was so strong and splendid. He could trust him anywhere. Anything Harold wished Raffles would do—die for him if need be—then why . . .

Suddenly Harold gripped his arm high up and said : " You aren't bothered—frightened about things, are you ? " At which he laughed and replied : " Not if you back me, " then questioned half-shyly, " you weren't cross because I want to play *Erl-King* were you ? "

"No! Run away and turn in as soon as you can," and so with a quick pressure they left it.

At midnight, when Cobham took charge, the boy went to his brother's cabin and turned in. But he was restless, his mind full of this strange notion that had come to him, wondering how soon he might test it . . . what Mums would think if she heard. It seemed she had asked him to play. He dozed considering it.

About three bells he was aware of his brother's entry; knew that a light shone in his face and that Harold went out as silently as he had come. . . . "Wants to know if I'm asleep," he thought, "and I'm awake. Couldn't sleep if I tried . . . I must do it to-night . . . I wonder if she will answer at once or if I shall have to wait till we get home."

He rose soon after and went bare-foot into the cabin where this evening he had played. The piano was open. He sat down and ran his fingers over the keys. Williams forgotten.

Grey at full length in his chair dozed puzzling and puzzling dozed. His brain refused sleep yet he dozed. It seethed with questions, answers, talk for which no reason could be found . . . what the devil was in the wind—the cephalopod again? Nonsense—the beast was drowned. The skipper? Absurd, he's wearing a strait-jacket and the men are at hand. Tremors? What if they came—the old *Kow-Loon* knew how to meet them . . . Dreams? Well, perhaps. He was weary; ready to sleep the clock round and in a week he would do so.

He considered this, expectant, a smile on lips usually

close set, and for a time undeniably he slept . . . slept as he had not since that night when the skipper broke loose. . . .

Again he became restless. He stirred, saying swiftly through clenched teeth: "No, no, no! For God's sake!" but did not wake. Music was in the air as on that night when he sat in his chair listening, the sob of the monsoon across the harbour in his ears. It went on and on, the same beautiful phrasing, the same restless harmonies, the pursuing bass, the octaves beating out the stride of a galloping horse. . . . Grey's voice blended with it, begging for mercy, pleading with muffled words: "For God's sake! For God's sake," over and over again . . . then with sudden knowledge, half-twisted upon his elbow: "Mums! Is that you?"

The man at the wheel heard the music, but the Chief's voice did not reach him. Young Cobham leaning over the fife-rail, heard the music and knew who played. He was untroubled by the march of events other than the laggard progress of his watch, the fact that the breeze was less steady, and found Raffles' harmonies inspiriting. They so seldom had music now. . . . Rather different he remembered to the days before poor Downes went west. He wondered what time it was—that is all; while Grey whose mind was troubled by the mystery he faced, rested smiling, sure, in spite of his prayer, that he heard again the message his mother sent.

It gave him no pain at the moment. He was content at length to believe; to take it on trust as one of those marvels which are possible between mind and mind;

which distance had no power to stay. He lay there entranced by this thought, quiet now as the watching stars.

Five bells striking close at hand put a period to that and he sprang up conscious at once of his brother. Good God! Where was Raffles? He twisted, calling the officer of the watch. Cobham came near.

"Where's the old man?" Grey asked.

"In his cabin, sir."

"Anyone on guard?"

"Davis, sir. I had to call one away just now, squall coming up."

"Something woke me," Grey pleaded, "a noise . . . music . . . someone playing—did you hear it?"

To his amazement Cobham replied that they all heard it. Raffles had been playing.

"Raffles? In his watch below. . . . Now?" Grey rose, rubbing his eyes. He moved like one suddenly bereft, turned towards the companion, halted, came back and said: "But you don't hear it *now*?"

"No, sir. He stopped some time ago . . ."

"How long?" came swiftly upon that.

"Ten minutes—perhaps fifteen; why?"

"God knows . . ."

Grey started off with the phrase, dipped under the scuttle and clattered downstairs. The drone of an unending complaint touched him as he halted a moment searching the cabin for the guard. The man was not there. Outside on the deck he heard voices, voices calling. Grey noted the fact and hurried down the alleyway and entered his cabin. "Raffles! Raffles!" on his tongue, soundless as yet—like a sob.

An empty cabin faced him. No one in the bunk . . . a blanket tossed back! Of course! Raffles had been playing in the cabin . . . there still; hadn't returned! He harked back, raced through the saloon and opened the after cabin door.

No one there either. No sound. All in darkness—the threnody running, voiceless calling on Raffles, Raffles, changing as he groped his way, to terms of endearment, prayer: "Billee! Billee! where are you? How can I go back if you are gone. . . . Why did you play? Billee? Billee! don't play the fool . . ."

He came to the piano. It stood open. He pressed nearer and touched the keys; touched something soft which lay beside the music stool, touched it with his foot . . . stooped, hands outspread, feeling his way, and instantly came in contact with the boy's bare flesh.

He crouched down beside him and found him warm, the pyjamas he wore torn, his head doubled sidelong. In the dark he could see nothing clearly; shadows which the moonlight from the ports accentuated; shadows which took the form of a bloody mist that swam in his eyes and would not clear. He leaned there on his knees crooning over and over: "Billee! it's me . . . Harold . . . can't you hear? . . ." passing all the time his hands about and about searching for wounds, something to guide him; pressing close his ear on the boy's breast, listening . . . hearing nothing to guide him . . . leaned nearer in the dark of that still cabin and breathed deep breaths into his brother's mouth. Again, ear on heart, dismayed but sure of his diagnosis he rose and kneeled across him, one knee on

either side, and rolled him over till he lay upon his stomach, head twisted sidelong. Then with his hands set in the hollows above his hips, he pressed down and lifted up, slowly, monotonously, while the tears and sweat blinded him, striving to produce respiration. . . . "Strangled . . . half-strangled!" now the cry which accompanied his work.

The boy was half-naked, unhampered by clothes, the darkness complete when Challoner entered carrying a lantern and calling: "Who's there? What's wrong?" Then caught a note of Grey's dirge as he bent over someone lying on deck: "Billee! Billee! What must I tell her? . . ." saw him stoop forward his ear low and called to steady him and give him help: "Challoner here, sir. Want a spell?"

And instantly there came back: "No—more light. Air . . ."

Challoner found both, and on his knees beside Grey asked: "How long have you been doing it?"

"Perhaps ten minutes . . . any sign of congestion . . . or . . ."

"No sign at all." Then quickly: "Turn him round—the second process, I will look after his tongue. . . ."

So they worked through the long hours as it seemed to Grey; reversing the boy's limp body from time to time, now using Schäfer's method now Silvester's until signs appeared telling them success might be theirs—success which after two hours' unceasing effort still hung in the balance; so near Billee had been to the Throne.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE INDENTURES

BY five o'clock Raffles was out of danger, sleeping in Grey's bunk with Madeline watching—Madeline, to whose quickness in all probability he owed his life.

The story came to Grey in snippets, mainly from her father, with corroborative touches from men who had been on duty in the cabin. It appeared that for several nights either Challoner or Madeline had been on watch in the after cabin. They had so arranged some chairs and a screen that it was possible to keep an eye on the Captain's door and yet be unseen. In any case there was Miss Challoner when Billee came in shortly after four bells, and sitting down before the piano began to play. He was in pyjamas and without shoes or cap. She thought he was walking in his sleep, as in a sense he was, and was afraid to disturb him. "You must recollect," Challoner said, "she could see very little. The cabin was in darkness but for the moonlight which filtered in at the ports. He played Schubert's *Erl-King* with amazing brilliance and she shivered as she listened—so weird was the scene. She felt that something was going to happen and wondered if she could get out without waking him . . . then a light, not bright, appeared on the Captain's door. . . .

"She thought it was the reflection of the sentry's lantern; that he was coming in because Billee was playing, but found on looking round there was no sentry, no lantern—only the ports giving their soft glow. This other, she was facing, was lamplight, yellow. She continued to watch it, until she discovered there was a hole in the door, saw a hand

come through ; two hands, saw them move the bar, wanted to scream ; heard the click of the lock as the key was turned and realized that if she stirred now she would be discovered.

“ Had she moved she might perhaps have saved the sentry ; but in spite of her alarm she was intent on making sure who came, and why—that was what she was there for, poor dear. . . . And so, you can see, several moments passed which might have been utilized for raising the alarm. Then out he came and turned directly to enter the saloon. She saw then it was the mad skipper. Still the music went on as she rose to follow. She wanted to get into communication with the deck and crept out. Two men were struggling together on the floor as she emerged—a sort of soundless fight, terrible to witness. She fled round the table and so down into the alleyway to call me.”

It took some minutes, five, six—ten, before Challoner and his daughter reached the saloon again, and found the man lying in the same place—huddled in a heap ; the skipper gone.

The music had ceased too ; but Madeline forgot about Billee when she saw the man at her feet. She helped her father to pick him up and carry him on deck. They were so busy trying artificial respiration they failed to make the officer hear. She caught sight of Captain Grey and called to him ; but he, too, passed on.

“ If I had thought either of you were there,” Grey said, speaking for the first time, “ I could have shown you how to call us. One blast would have brought all hands. . . . Let it pass ! You saved Billee ! I can’t

thank you—I have lost the words . . . I don't know that I shall ever find them again ! ”

So it came about that when Billee was sleeping and Madeline watching him, the mad skipper safe in his cage, Grey and the Doctor went into his cabin to seek out the mystery of the door which the officers had found shut and barred when they arrived, exactly as they left it at eight bells. At that time Billee was in his brother's hands ; Williams droning out prayers within and everything appeared normal.

It was an old, old door ; probably as old as the ship, built of teak, the mouldings and panels all toned by age to one colour. Grey, Challoner and the ship's carpenter were there for an hour, tapping, searching for a secret spring for any known or unknown method of opening a section of it as described by Madeline. It would have been easy to order the whole surface to be sheathed on the outside ; but they were anxious to discover how the thing had been effected.

They were getting annoyed, when Grey, standing within the cabin, passed one finger down a moulding, felt something sharp and pulled back his hand, calling to the carpenter : “ What the devil's this ? ”

“ A screw, sir,” he answered, examining it.

“ Take it out,” Grey ordered. “ What is it doing there ? ”

“ Shouldn't be there at all, sir. Also it's burred with twisting—that's why it cut.”

He passed it to the Chief and fingered the moulding saying it seemed firm.

“ Slip your chisel under and see if it will lift,” Challoner suggested.

He did so and found it came apart as did the other

three sides quite easily. "Mortised joints, sir—most unusual," Chips announced. "I doubt if there's its like in the ship, an' whoever fitted it knew his work—the hull panel will come out now, or I'm a Dutchman."

It came so easily it fell at their feet leaving a gap fifteen inches by twenty-four—large enough for a man to pass through.

They looked at each other, uncertain whether to laugh or swear. Then Grey said: "That is what was going on when the bosun was searching for Mr Elgar. He came to me and reported 'sawing' and said it sounded as though it was from the lazaret—where you and I, Doctor, searched for a trap-door and drew a blank. . . . It is just on the cards we might have discovered this sooner if we had not been led astray by that report."

"Very little doubt about that," Challoner acknowledged. "What will you do with it now—fix it up again?"

"Yes—but we won't use the screw, Carpenter; peg it and see if he opens it," Grey directed; then he added, "I am not running any more risks this side of Kupang. He will go to roost to-night in leg-irons after I have done with him. You may tell Sails it's essential and he is at liberty to make what use of it he chooses when we reach London."

When the carpenter had gone Grey shut and locked the door, then led into the forward cabin to resume their search for the missing packet. "He was sitting here," he said, "leaning back upon the settee. I stepped aside, opened that door and called the guard. We were beside him in half a minute, but the packet had disappeared."

"Then it is somewhere within reach," Challoner decided.

"It must have been," Grey conceded "Now it may be anywhere for I was slow on the uptake—slow when I should have been swift."

They worked methodically to rectify this, turning the cushions and putting them aside until they came to a locker which hitherto they had not opened. At some time it had been sealed, but the tape was torn. They opened it and found it empty but for a Gladstone bag which they pulled out. It was well smothered with labels showing the various journeys of its owner. England, South America and India were represented, together with a P. & O. ticket pointing to Williams' final trip from Rangoon to Hong-Kong.

They dragged it out into the light and Grey produced a bunch of keys saying: "I found them, they are his and I no longer have a conscience——" An admission Challoner applauded all the more heartily when the bag was opened. Tracts they found which dealt with the various creeds of the East; some in English, others in Urdu—all bethumbed and showing long use. A few books, odd garments and scarfs were there; a number of old letters tied up with red tape, a long envelope and packet stuffed with papers and unsealed.

"These may be interesting," Grey said, as he tossed them out and searched for more, his thoughts still busy with the packet which had slipped through his fingers. But it was not there. . . .

"Sample these," Challoner joked to cheer him. "They seem to carry us somewhere along the road. What are they?"

He was turning over a sheaf of papers about the size of bank-notes and of similar texture—crisp, crinkly, when Grey rose from his knees and joined him. “Discharges,” he answered at once, “the papers given to seamen at the end of a voyage. Better let me handle them.” He ran through calling the man’s standing from an ordinary seaman to mate; then said: “As I thought. Trained out here. Nearly all these discharges were given in Bombay and Calcutta. They date back to the ’60’s . . . but there’s no *Sorisha* among them.” He turned them down and picked up a second bundle, saying with a fresh ring in his voice: “Now we are coming to it. Here are his indentures with Lal Chandra Azinganji Shipping Co., Bombay and Madras,” he continued to skim as he read the essentials. “Head Office, Frere Road, Bombay—of the one part, Shâhdara Williams, age 12 years and 2 months of the other . . . for the term of five years . . . ending Dec. 1857, and signed, Yakub Nur . . .” he went slowly here, his brain ceaselessly at work, “presumably the father or . . . the guardian of this . . . promising infant—Good God! I wonder . . .”

“Nur?” Challoner commented. “Yakub Nur . . .”

“Yes. Weren’t there some initials S. N. in that table we were going through?”

“There were and the translation obviously is Shâhdara Nur.”

“Then why is the boy’s name given as Shâhdara Williams in the preamble?” Grey asked and received no answer.

They sat, looking one at the other, tracing, each of them in his own way, the different terminals they had acquired which led to this. At length Challoner said:

"The truth is that a considerable slice is still missing . . . a decade, perhaps more, what?"

"From '41 to '52—yes. Eleven years."

"'41 is the year your father became Captain of the *Kow-Loon* for the first time?"

"Yes."

"Well—but you tell me the name of this man who was second mate with your father later—in '70, if I remember rightly, was not Williams. Are you positive about that?"

"Absolutely. Nor was it Nur. I couldn't have passed a name of that sort. As to shipping in a false name that is easy enough even in these days; but in the '70's it was child's play. . . . Of course there may be another discharge note somewhere; or, he may have destroyed it on the ground that burnt papers tell no tales. It is all guesswork as to that, yet I am inclined to think that is the solution as all these papers give S. Williams plainly. As a matter of fact," he added thoughtfully, "my father's name gives place to Mr Nur."

In this Challoner concurred; then he said: "Well, we can leave that. So far we have established that Shâhdara Williams is apprenticed by Yakub Nur, whose name by the way points again to the Khyber, and that in your chronological table we have against the year 1841 the initials 'S. N. Age 1 year.' It therefore becomes more important than ever to recover the packet."

"If he hasn't destroyed it," Grey said, "it is about his person. That means we must search him."

"Yes . . . but tell me how a man of this type comes to be captain in the Merchant Service?"

"If he could pass his examinations there is nothing to prevent it. If London or Liverpool bucked at his standing and colour, Glasgow or Hull would let him through. Also he could pass out here."

"Then it is not an isolated case?"

"No—I wish it were. There are scores of foreigners in command. They sail the ships more cheaply and take less pay. It is one of the reasons which has determined me to get into something else when I'm at home this trip."

"Um! Yes—I think you are wise. . . . Now what about this search?"

"I must have a look around first. We are drawing down to Api and the weather is scarcely as promising as it was. We will put these things straight, keep what we want and bury the bag where we found it."

This was soon done and when they reached the poop Cobham came across to say the wind was heading them and the ship had already broken off four points. A few quick questions and answers passed between the two, then Grey went aft and stood by the compass.

There was more wind than when they left the deck. The sun peeped at intervals through clouds which were becoming closely packed; while Api flared busily dead ahead. Spray was flying and *Kow-Loon* going like a racer, with weather leaches lifting. Occasionally, too, sounded the roar of canvas shivering as the wind drew ahead.

Grey crossed over and stood near the cage where Challoner was watching Williams. "We can't go on like this. I shall have to go about* at eight bells and risk the weather," he announced.

* Tack.

"Our friend in the cage seems to like it less than you do," Challoner smiled as they turned together to draw near. The umbrella was furred or blown away, Williams kneeling to face the east praying without regard for those who watched and occasionally bending to touch the deck with his forehead. A patter of words escaped each time he sank back on his heels; silence when he bowed. Quite plainly his Gods were of the East, quite plainly, too, he was trembling with fear.

"Poor devil!" Grey exclaimed as he had before, "I wonder what is at the back of it. Although I know what he has done here and believe he killed my father, I can't help pitying him when I see him like this. Is that natural?"

"Quite, for a man of your temperament, my friend."

"You mean artistic?"

"Certainly. But I don't think you will allow it to hamper your judgment. This man is a criminal lunatic now, let his history be what it may; and in England he would be detained during Her Majesty's pleasure—safe. Here he is an absolute peril to the ship, to himself and all hands, and on you lies the burden and privilege of command."

"I am going through with it," Grey answered. "You need feel no alarm."

Shortly after this they fetched their sextants and prepared to take such opportunities as the sun afforded for the meridian sights. Watched the ship break off still further, and at eight bells, with cro'jack and mainsail tripped, went round with a swirl that spoke of their skill as seamen not less than to the fine qualities

of this product of the shipyards of Hind. It was the first time either Madeline or her father had witnessed this evolution in a fresh breeze and they found it exhilarating.

An hour later *Kow-Loon* was heading directly for the straits and reeling off a steady ten knots. Now Ombai Island's north-east point was but 100 miles distant at noon; therefore if the breeze held Grey would find himself in touch with land at midnight; straits he had never yet been through and a Portuguese Settlement in the offing. Wise men refuse to take risks of this nature and Grey, in spite of youth, knew what he must do when the time came.

Williams was on the leese side now and as Grey crossed over to see how he fared he rose and stood plucking at the wire of his cage begging to be set free. He seemed to have forgotten Api belching fire and cinders far on the port beam, and to be terrified by the scend of the ship as she drove into the sea. Each time she buried her head knees, and sent spray in clouds along the lee rail, he crawled up to the weather side of his cage and clung there glancing round like a frightened monkey gibbering at his fôes.

He was capless, his hair long, his beard blown back upon him so that with his sallow skin and heavy scared eyes the Eurasian that was in him stood out for all to appraise.

Grey took no heed but sent a messenger for the bosun who presently came aft, and to him he said: "I'm going to take him out of this. He seems half dead with fright and I want to search him."

"In 'is cabin, sir?"

"Yes. Think we can manage him?"

"Never gives no trouble to speak of, w'en we take 'im below, sir——"

Grey unlocked the wire gate and the bosun called out cheerily: "Now then, sir, up we rises—three bells has per usual."

Williams came towards them gibbering, singularly like a monkey in all his movements, and they took him by the arms, one on each side, and marched him to the companion.

"Down below," the bosun directed, "get dry one time," and the skipper took up the pidgin-English mincingly: "Ess! Down below good. Plenty too much wind top side. Typhoon come . . . Ess! Ketchee hell one time. . . ." All his biblical quotations forgotten, perhaps never to be recalled.

The bosun glanced at his Chief and said without hesitation: "Clean off it, sir. Thinks 'e's a bloomin' Chink!"

Williams accepted the statement grinning. He made no fuss. He might have been a drunken man two friends were guiding to his cabin until they entered it and Grey pointed to the leg-irons. Then in an instant he became savage.

With his hands held close within the canvas jacket, he seized the edge and giving an outward lift with the elbows ripped it through and flung it aside like a torn handkerchief. The move was so sudden neither anticipated it, and in a moment he had the bosun down and was kneeling upon him. Grey swiftly caught at the maniac and with one hand strove to pull him off, and with the other, his right, drew from his belt a short canvas roll and struck him hard at the base of the skull.

He fell like a log. The bosun climbed blinking from the deck, feeling his throat and saying indistinctly: "Lumme! 'Oo'd a' thought it?"

"Did he get hold?" Grey asked.

"Not 'im, sir—but 'e weren't a thousand miles off—— Sandbag, sir?"

"Yes. Last time I used it was in Shanghai—slit off this strait-jacket and give me his own. He won't come to yet awhile—but keep your eye on him while I search."

Methodically Grey went through the pockets, patted, twisted; felt the lining and again called: "Knife!" Slit a few stitches with it and withdrew the envelope.

It was intact, the seals unbroken. "Good!" Grey half sang the words as sailors do, adding, "Lord now lettest Thou!" came round to order, "Now for the leg-irons—quick! He's beginning to stir."

In a moment they were snapped and Grey, picking up the coat, said: "Get hold of his arms. We will slip it on—for on my word I believe he forgot he stole them."

He referred to the papers, but the bosun, as he struggled with the man's increasing limpness, supposed he alluded to his arms.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MESSAGE

WITH a stiff breeze and all sail *Kow-Loon* would have whipped anything less speedy than a mail steamer that afternoon on her way to the Strait, and at eight bells in the afternoon watch had made fifty miles of her distance.

When Grey came on deck soon after she was bowling away with the wind abeam, heeling in the old style, sniffing the ocean which awaited her, and everybody was agog either with joy or jeremiad. To-morrow at this time they might be at anchor in Kupang Harbour, one said; or "whitening" our bones on the rocks, another. . . . "Maybe there's gells at Kupang—it's Dutch, ain't it; then they'll be white—an' we'll see 'em," a bearded sailor volunteered. "Fat lot o' good that'll do ee," came in derision; "think the skipper's goin' to trust you among 'em?" So it went on.

Chips, on the other hand, was busy with a two-foot rule, a piece of pencil and a smooth timber short-end. He was putting down figures—surface measurements of "so many foot run o' bulwark left behind nigh to Sunda . . . likewise so many foot run of planking, so many of scantling to replace galley and house left at ditto," and at four o'clock Chips knew "to an effigraph," as he expressed it, just how much he would require. Also that as soon as they got away into the trades he would be busy as a monkey in a keg of nuts getting the ship ready for the Cape; but the skipper would be gone and the watches no longer crippled by hands doing sentry in the cabin.

Sails, a little man, soured by his inches, was in one of

his moods. The future watched him through blood-red spectacles. Disaster stood over them—it was going to blow if he knew anything. They would be reefed down before night—tryin’ to claw off it. It was easy to run while the wind was fair ; but it would cop her at the Strait and then where would they be? No—not up a tree ; but down a blinkin’ hole where you breaved water, not hair. Full o’ shallows is that Strait as a shark’s mouth is full o’ teeth ! If Sails had known the Latin tag—“ *facilis decensus Averno* ”—he would have quoted it, and as he did not, he spoke feelingly of the habits of congers, land-crabs and other denizens of tropic seas.

Grey meanwhile walked the poop taking note of the clouds, the breeze, the growing tendency to squalls, and compared these signs with a reading of the barometer taken when he came on deck. As a matter of fact he gave no thought to hazards, big or little. He was entered for this race—he called it a jaunt—mounted and going to win. It might be a neck-and-neck affair, but that was the spice which gave it flavour. Besides, had he not a message from his father which some day he would have time to read? *Nil desperandum !* Why croak?

He thought less of dangers or of the mad skipper than he did of Madeline and his brother. They were dears, both of them—and Madeline was as pretty as a picture. Cheeky, too ! Just remember how she tossed out “ *j’y suis, j’y reste !* ” . . . Not one in a million would have had the nerve to laugh at death in that fashion. Then came this question of reading the message. To begin with he was asked to keep it from Billee. That would be difficult. He could

scarcely remember a subject which he had not shared with Billee. Ship life cements very firmly the friendships of youth. Once formed they rarely die—all through life the memories live, and now, as luck would have it, just when Billee wanted a bit of help he would have to keep his teeth shut! Wait; would it not be possible to cut out parts that might hurt?

Now, when Grey had got what he called the hang of things, and had spoken to Cobham, he descended the poop ladder and in the lobby came full front upon Madeline—he supposed it was by chance, thanked the Gods, took her hand and said: “You look lovely,” and then, as she smiled and flushed under his scrutiny, “have I known you long enough to say that?”

“A month or five weeks . . . perhaps it may justify you,” she laughed.

“But does it?”

“I think you exaggerate,” she said, with just that touch of challenge that is so helpful to men; “how can one be anything in this kit?”

He shook that to the winds. “If it comes to logic I’m done,” said he. “As a matter of fact I am always looking for words to express what I see. When I saw you sitting among all those salvaged sailors I had nothing to say; but I was wondering where I had seen you—and that perhaps I had . . .”

“In one of your reincarnations?” she smiled, withdrawing her hand.

“Reincarnations are dead, Miss Challoner. Tomorrow or the next day we shall be on pukka blue sea, miasma forgotten, mad skipper gone, mermaids lost, snakes, earthquakes and all the brazen Josses of Hind left behind and . . . oh! what about Billee?”

"He's waiting to know if he may take his watch," she said, the transition notwithstanding.

"No—he may not. I'm taking it because I must. . . . And then to-morrow afternoon I suppose you will be going ashore."

"What for?"

"Shops, for instance, I expect they have some, and of course mail steamers of some kind touch there."

"Dutch coasting boats?" she asked, head in air. "No thank you—I prefer *Kow-Loon*, and that reminds me—what about those blankets?"

"You mean it?" he asked delighted.

"Of course I do; but if there are shops perhaps we may not have to use so many blankets—*au revoir*."

Again she was gone and he had not thanked her for saving Billee! Well, it must keep. Someday it might be easier. He opened his cabin door and entered. Billee lying on the settee immediately twisted to greet him with his request: "Can't I get up, Harold? I'm sick of this," he urged.

"Gently does it, dear boy—pulse and temperature have to be considered; also that brute's wrench to your neck." He sat beside him leaning back finger on wrist, grave as a surgeon just out of the egg.

"Who were you talking to outside—Madeline?" Billee wondered.

"Do you call her that?" Grey asked, his eyes quickly on his brother's.

"Yes—why shouldn't I? She calls me Billee and you Harold—then . . ."

"Of course," Grey smiled, "if she does that you have a very good excuse. . . . Yes—pulse isn't so

dusty . . . slip this under your tongue and don't chew the end off it, while I look at your neck."

He put his arm under his brother's shoulders and lifted him gently. "That hurt as much as it did?"

The boy winced and Harold set him back on the sloped couch. "Afraid there's no chance to-night, Billee. More bandages yet. . . . To-morrow, perhaps. Now give me the thermometer. Mm! yes——" He crossed to the port and re-read it. "No—not to-night, old chap. As a matter of fact I would like the Doctor to look at you first—Kupang, not Challoner. I think it's muscular, but something will have to get better before you can do much on Mount Misery—and I want to take you back sound. . . ."

He was leaning over him now, pushing back the dark hair with a touch as soft as Mums', when Billee, under the influence, reached up and drew Harold's face nearer. "I want to thank you," he whispered, his eyes full, "for pulling me back. I didn't want to go—for there's Mums—and I want to—to write some things first——"

"What was it like?" Harold questioned, pushing this aside, seeking knowledge of the beyond as always. "Did you see anyone? Father, Mother—God; *anything*—while you were away?"

"Just a blackness," Billee answered, cheek to cheek with his brother, "a lot of little sparks . . . then nothing but a singing——" He kissed Harold's lips as he slid back.

"No message . . . nothing from Mums?"

"No—that would have been Heaven. This was Hell!"

"God give me patience!" Grey prayed as he moved from his embrace.

Four bells, the end of the first dog watch, the sun sinking through a crimson cloud-rack flaming high in the west. The bosun's pipes calling all hands; the watch swearing, tea postponed—everything as it should not be in Jack's eyes, because the sunset squall had shown its teeth.

"Down flying-jib—t'gall'nt and royal stays'ls. Royal halliards let go! . . . Downhauls there some of you! Look lively!"

That as a beginning. Spray flying, not so warm to men accustomed to the fires of Java Sea. A mess of flung-down gear sweeping into the lee scuppers, shouts from the men on downhauls and clew lines; canvas whanging high in the dark; topsails and courses shivering with a machine-gun fire of reef points—then again a voice: "Let go t'gall'nt halliards," and in a dull shout as they rattled to the caps, "Clew up and furl."

All, so far, as predicted by one known as Sails, a quiet Westcountryman of humanitarian views; peas and potatoes for prisoners, not punishment. . . . Yet *Kow-Loon* sneezed on her way to the Strait and no spars tangled her lee rigging, nor were any split kites visible for Sails to patch on the morrow.

The sunset squall. Nothing more. Its weight and incidence not quite gauged by young Cobham, standing there on the poop, giving orders which interfered with the men's peace at the moment of all others when *noli me tangere* is law.

That on the surface. Below in the Captain's cabin a man in leg-irons badly scared, crouching on deck like a dog hugging close the wall known as the weather bulkhead ; ready to slide to leeward when the next lurch took him. A man babbling, whether from fear or the visions of madness, who shall say who have not themselves been mad ?

All night the wind held fresh from north-east ; but the ship under easy canvas after ten o'clock made no to-do about weather. Then at twelve the moon got power and swept the sky clear so that when daylight flashed over the eastern seaboard, *Kow-Loon* had entered the Strait. Wetta, 4390 feet of purple cone stood revealed against the chrome ; while the cliffs of Ombai, 6000 odd feet high, took the rosy tints of paradise for those unfortunates who never would prove their sterility.

Dilhi of the Portuguese was faint under the glowing sun, a blue haze upon it, the mountain range of Timor rising grandly to terrorize it. . . . To the sou'-west blue water, the open sea they had striven to reach, where from time immemorial the Red, White and Blue ensigns of England have whipped in the salt tang and carried men whose Joss is of another incarnation than those of the East—One who is Omnipotent yet does not carp at praying-wheels nor discriminate against those who wear on their foreheads the sign of those Children whose *mantra* is "*Om ! Mani padme, hum !*" more harshly than on those whose prayer is *Ave Maria*.

Now, when the sun no longer stared under the awning, they brought Billee on deck ; carrying him on

a mattress-stretcher so that he might watch the land go by. But he was unimpressed by panorama, asked for Harold, and as Madeline was the courier employed Harold appeared. He had been up all night, but a bath direct from the bosun's hose at 6.30, followed by coffee and toast taken barefoot on the wet decks, had banished sleep, yet he came reluctantly.

It appeared that Billee had been questioning Madeline about the packet, upon which she had told him it was found—and how. Now with much trepidation Harold was to read it.

All hands were on deck—that as a *sine quâ non*; for in the days and of ships of *Kow-Loon's* breed, men were not yet blasé from contact with the machine which carries their sons and grandsons along a track which has already been plotted for them by folk in an office. One hundred and sixty miles of strange land lay on either hand for them to consider; land on which they might build castles or destroy them; people it with saints or satyrs; or take it for granted the mountains were volcanoes, the valleys crammed with sulphurous pits which boiled and bubbled as they did in Celebes, like a section of Hades—all of which would depend on your outlook on life and the personal equation. In any case something Billee would not find amusing.

So the Chief settled down after having persuaded the Challoners to join them, wondering how much he would have to omit for Billee's sake, and how much for Madeline's.

The writing was in his father's hand, addressed to his wife and headed:

“ In the Bay of Bengal,

June 10, 1870.

“ My dear girl,” it began, “ I am plagued by memories, and conceive it is time I put on paper certain incidents of which long ago you were aware, so that you may be able to hand it to the boys if ever it becomes necessary. I think it especially essential to do so now, having in mind what occurred during my last visit to the Maharajah in 1857. Thirteen years ago !

“ In 1840, the year I was appointed Captain of the dear old ship—then in the service of the H.I.E.C.—we sailed from London, having with us as passengers the Maharajah of Balanpore and several members of his suite.

“ Among them was an able man, Yakub Nur, a Malik, or Chief, at one time of the Zakah Khel Afridis. He was Commander-in-Chief of His Highness’s Army, and, I was told, a brilliant soldier.

“ There were others of like importance, but as they are foreign to my story I omit their names. One other, however, remains to be mentioned. A young and beautiful Welsh girl who had been entrusted to my care by her parents—as is usual often in the case of women who are voyaging alone. Apart from this presentation I had no knowledge of her or of her friends ; but I was told she would be met at Bombay by relatives who were in the service of the H.I.E.C. living something short of one hundred miles south of Bombay. Her name Vida Williams. . . .”

Harold paused, his thoughts on his mother’s warning, scanned a few lines and then said :

“ Williams ! Why, that’s the name of our skipper,”

while in his mind rose a picture of that personage whom he had labelled *drabb*. A connection between these two had immediately arisen. He could not account for it, yet there it was. A beautiful girl and the mad skipper! It seemed impossible, unnatural—abhorrent—for he had not yet learned what terror and the anguish of a woman unhappily in thrall to a man may do for a child before it is born.

Billee lying very still, the dry, hot wind fanning him, said: "Do go on. It sounds like a book—is this what Mums told you to read when we were in Hong-Kong?"

Grey answered and continued without comment.

"There is no necessity to speak of our voyage. It was similar to others, only the weather was remarkably fine after getting clear of Channel. There were dances, charades, games and the usual love-making among the passengers. The Commander-in-Chief was very popular among the ladies, perhaps more so than the Maharajah, who was considerably older, and it was curious to notice the attraction some of the younger women seemed to find, not only in Yakub Nur, but with others of his staff. True they were fine-looking, splendid-looking men; but what could either one of these girls have in common with persons so far removed from English conventions?"

"Still, undeniably these soldiers when in full kit, as sometimes was the case, were dazzling objects for the women, and I have heard Officials of John Company complain that they had 'no chance at all.' Of course that may have been an exaggeration. In any case, I took occasion one evening after a dance in which Miss Williams had been conspicuous with these officers, to point out the difference that exists always between

men of the East and Englishmen. I spoke, you will understand, impersonally, more as though I were giving a lecture to a group of students, and ventured even so far as to touch the question of the hareem-existence of the women of Eastern lands. . . .

“Possibly I did not paint the system black enough—I am unable to say. I spoke in a general way to a group of five or six of the youngest and most vivacious of the passengers—and I fear, although I may be wrong here, that I did not impress this girl sufficiently. It is quite possible she would have been horrified had I put it more plainly; alarmed—I don’t know. Quite possibly, too, that she did not consider the Commander-in-Chief’s attentions at all. In any case, I do not remember any voyage where I have had less trouble, nor one that can compare with it in any way. His Highness the Maharajah was so delighted with the ship and with the seamanlike demeanour of the crew that he honoured me as their Commander with an invitation to the palace on our arrival at Bombay.

“It was there one night as I entered my room rather weary after festivities which had included a Nautch and the interminable banging of tom-toms, that I again came upon Miss Williams, whom I last saw a month earlier started on her journey, as I understood, to her relations. I now saw her dressed in the garments of India, accompanied by a woman of the Ayah class who seemed beside herself with fear.

“The lady, her mistress, came to implore my assistance. She told me her relations had been unable to meet her and that a friend of theirs, who was to have taken their place, failed to arrive in time. The

upshot was that Miss Williams started without him, the Ayah her sole companion. Then followed a chapter of accidents. The coach service broke down—I failed to learn why or how, and she finally reached the Maharajah's capital, some two hundred miles distant from her friends.

“Of course I very soon discovered the Commander-in-Chief was concerned in this ; for the girl had been an inmate of his hareem—kidnapped, put it as you choose ; but stolen against her will. I asked whether she had seen Yakub Nur since she arrived, to which she replied that he had not yet returned from the Army which he had been ordered to inspect after landing ; but that he was expected daily. She had been a prisoner since she came to the capital, but the Ayah was able to get out and learned that I was a visitor at the Palace, hence her determination to see me. It had been difficult. Without the Ayah it would have been impossible ; there was a terrible slave, in charge of the hareem, a man nearly black, who they said told his master everything that happened. I asked why she gave me to understand her friends were in the City, on our arrival at Bombay, and she said Nur, whom she happened to meet, told her it was unnecessary to wait for them, made light of the journey, helped to arrange matters and had undoubtedly sent orders to intercept her and bring her to the Capital.

“Possibly he was ignorant that I had been honoured by an invitation and would shortly proceed thither also. Or, he may have been so infatuated by the girl's beauty that he decided to risk discovery.

“Well, difficult as it was, and weary as I was, I

decided to see H.H. before I slept; and was so successful that I managed to intercept him before he retired. Putting all other matters aside, you must understand, I felt I was to some extent responsible for the fate of this young girl—who had been given into my charge by her amiable relatives. And at the risk of angering H.H. I put the matter as shortly as possible and asked him to intervene. . . .

“ ‘Yakub Nur!’ he said. ‘The Master of my Army is greedy; he is already married and has many concubines. How great is his folly that he should seek to add to the number! It is more easy,’ he quoted in Hindustani, ‘to discover a white crow, or the imprint of fishes’ feet, than for a Prince to learn what is at the heart of his servants’; and on my appeal translated the proverb for my enlightenment.

“Then he sat for a while immersed in thought. At length came his decision: ‘The Commander-in-Chief is at present three-days’ march from the Capital. I will send servants who will see to the lady’s comfort and safety at once—but first tell me, who is this protégé of yours—is she noble?’

“I told him what little I knew and he said: ‘Ah, the Factor is then aware of her coming?’ And again he remained silent awhile. Then rising said: ‘Let it be as I said. I will give her protection.’

“And with that I was glad to make my escape, as you may guess. I went to my rooms and told her what had been arranged and presently on the arrival of the escort, bade her be of good cheer and she departed together with her attendant.

“I have never seen her since. The Maharajah told me what had been done, and at the end of my visit I

left the palace in the full belief that Miss Williams had arrived at her friends' house in safety.

"Twice after that date I was a guest of the Maharajah; the second time in 1857, a year after you and I, my dear, were married. You were then living at Lahore and may remember my letters recounting the various amusements contrived for my entertainment. All recollection of the effort I had made on Miss Williams' behalf had faded from my memory. Then, towards the end of my visit, occurred the attempt on the Maharajah's life which I was so fortunate as to avert. I will recount it briefly.

"H.H. and myself were walking together in the gardens when a youth dressed in the garb of a student—a *Talib* of the Afridis as I was told afterwards—which is to say a Mullah of the lesser kind; one who stirs up mischief among the Hill tribes—approached carrying a paper, salaaming as he came. The Maharajah, an easy man at all times with petition bearers, signed for him to approach, and as he did so I noticed the man's hand go down to his knife. In an instant he would have struck, but I was so lucky as to seize his arm and hold him in spite of his struggles to gain freedom. H.H. came to my assistance, the guard quickly appeared and he was secured.

"Who are you?" asked His Highness, coolly confronting him, a half-smile on his splendid features.

"Shâhdara Nur, Lord of the Universe,' the lad made answer, 'Son of thy Commander-in-Chief, it is said, and his slave who is dead of the bow-string.'

"And thy slave-mother's name?"

"She was called Williams,' he said, in the singing

intonation of the Baboo which is akin as I have thought to the Welsh.

“ ‘Williams!’ H.H. exclaimed, obviously disconcerted even as I, upon whom the name came in a flash. ‘Whence did she come, and how was she the slave of Yakub Nur, thy father?’ ”

“ ‘She came over the black waters in a ship which brought also with the Lord of Heaven and Earth, Yakub Nur, the Commander of his Army.’ ”

“ The Maharajah stood silent some minutes, then he turned to me and said : ‘It may be as he says. Strange things occur. I have a mind to confront him with the Malik.’ So we went together to a pavilion and sat, the guard remaining out of hearing. Question and answer passed rapidly. It was made known to the youth that I was Commander of *Kow-Loon* who brought the ship to Bombay, then he turned on me with a torrent of words, accusing me of selling his mother to this man and nothing we could say appeased his fury. It transpired, while in his raving, that he was uncertain whether Nur or H.H. was his father. Either was possible as God in Heaven knew, for Nur had driven him to seek his bread on the black waters—he spoke of the sea always as *Tor-obo*, and in his rage mixed terms and language, speaking sometimes in Urdu, with phrases from the Afridis, sometimes in his sing-song English, most difficult to follow.

“ ‘He was a sailor,’ he said, ‘who one day would be captain and able to show *Feringbies* how little he loved them. In short his conduct and speech became so abusive he was given over to the guard with orders to keep him prisoner—’ Until,’ H.H. said to me, ‘I can confront him with my Commander-in-Chief. By that

time he may have learned to curb his tongue. He undoubtedly has Afridi blood in his veins. Nur, also—though in his case it is qualified by a strain from *Saltinat-i-Khodadad*,* the God-granted country. Now Nur is a good soldier—otherwise I might look less gently on his foibles.’

“But before this gentleman returned from the Hills, where the troops were in cantonments during the rains, my leave expired. So my visit came to an end without further experience of the mad sailor of black waters . . . as the Maharajah called him. Actually I did not wish to see him. The accusation he hurled at me was so devilish and given with such violence that I had difficulty in restraining my temper. Obviously he was without balance, otherwise I think I should have forestalled his jailors in their use of the rattan. As it stands, you will see, I had been the recipient of an insult for which on board ship I would order the cat, yet made no to-do. . . . But why speak of it?

“Again, if this part of his story be true, why consider the teller of it, or his manner of telling, when the terrible ordeal his mother faced lies in the other scale?”

Then followed a blank page, and on the next was written :

“Ship *Sorisha*,

“Bay of Bengal. Lat. Lo. 52 N. Long. 90.10 E.

“June 15, 1870.

“I have opened this record, dear wife, to add a few words which may explain what troubles me now

* Afghanistan.

that our way is easy, fortune ample, our future planned. In six months, certainly in less than a year, we shall be at home finally settled and I shall have said good-bye to the sea—all as you so earnestly desire for the sake of the boys. Our last voyage—yet I am troubled. . . .

“I had better explain it all in writing. Some things I should be unwilling to speak of even as a joke—the rest is merely surmise—and it all comes, as I believe, of the mad sailor of black waters; the *bête noir* which from time to time has arrived for me to slay in silence. You know how I dislike anything in the nature of an attempt to read the future. Yet, here am I, questioning what I must do. . . .

“Actually I can do nothing. The man has not shown his hand; he is civil, diligent and up to his work—what man? I should explain that first. In Calcutta, you remember when the second officer went down with fever shortly before we sailed I had to replace him. Goodson is the man. Whether I like him or not is beside the point. He does his work, but his appearance is against him. He is Eurasian. It was less apparent when I saw him ashore, the length of his hair and beard has added to the likeness. I can give no other reason for the supposition that slowly forces itself upon me. I see in Goodson a replica of the spitfire from whom I saved the Maharajah of Balanpore; the man himself—and that in spite of the fifteen years which have elapsed, for, as you know, I never forget faces.

“He is curiously long in the arms; his fingers, too, remind me of the youth clutching his *kukri*—long,

knotted. He had a touch of the sing-song speech I have noticed among Babus ; he is broad, and in silhouette has the look of an ape to some degree. . . . Still, he is civil to a degree ; seems spellbound when you sing—and singularly, when you sing and play the *Erl-King*, is beside himself, I know not what with, perhaps emotion. Who can say ?

“That he follows you with his eyes is apparent enough to anyone who happens to be near. That you rarely speak to him, and when you do seem instinctively to repulse him, I can see plainly—and it adds to my . . . what shall I call it ? Apprehension ? Heaven knows. I am no analyst in these matters. Let it rest there. . . .”

Then followed a note which Harold read with difficulty. It was prefaced :

“*June 30th.* Off Java Head. To-morrow if the wind holds we shall be in the Strait ; but it may not hold.

“I have read through what I have written and shall seal it up to-night, so that you may find it if the hour strikes. If it does not I shall destroy it when we reach Hong-Kong. I have indisputable evidence He is the man and here for a purpose.

“Singularly enough, the other night I came up in the mid-watch to look around. Goodson was in charge, the ship a couple of points off her course, and we had words. The man suddenly flared with anger and until I brought him to his senses by threatening to put him under arrest, he was like a madman. I may have been a little short in my manner. I have no recollection of that. If it were so, heaven knows I had just cause.

I like the fellow less every day ; nevertheless, when he did come to himself I give him his due, he apologized humbly—I had almost said abjectly. . . . So good night and God rest us all.

“ J. H. GREY.”

They sat long talking over the various matters left in doubt by this writing. Who, for instance, was the father of this personage whom they termed the mad skipper ? If Nur were the man why was the boy in his indentures called Williams ; and why Shâhdara ? Shâhdara as the world knows is the tomb of the Emperor Shahjehan and the beautiful woman who so long refused to be his wife.

If there were any possibility of a suggested analogy here, was the Maharajah his father ?

Doctor Challoner thought that in that case, even if there were the smallest suspicion in Captain Grey's mind, he would scarcely have spoken so highly of that ruler.

Harold agreed. As far as he could remember his father always spoke of the Maharajah as a man of the highest integrity—and so they perforce left it. In his opinion Yakub Nur was the man. The Maharajah was of Southern India, Nur of the Khyber—and in Williams the features of the Hill tribes predominated.

His father's pathetic foreknowledge, too, Harold found intensely absorbing. It seemed to show that his theories were all wrong : but this Challoner denied.

Under certain conditions, he insisted, conditions which no man can analyse, it is possible to deduce the

future. As in telepathy so in presentiment, certain natures can overcome distance, or pierce the veil, and no one can explain how. . . . "And," he added, "it were better for man that he remain ignorant."

CHAPTER XX

HOMeward BOUND

THEY cast anchor in Kupang Bay after a skitter as the men termed it, which bid fair to eclipse all records, and found it unlovely. Burnt hills looked down on a group of red-tiled white houses perched on a barrier of coral rock to front the beach. Trees there were, but of a kind that seemed to tone with the surrounding brownness, and a pitiless sun glared down on all. No greenery, no forests, no chance of goddesses reclining in leafy shade. Shops of a sort known as Chandleries and go-downs; noisy Papuans instead of the slim, reserved Malays; men whom the sailors at once dubbed Fuzzies. True, their thatch was exuberant, their faces black, a waistcloth their garment instead of the sarong.

Still, what matters that? The skipper on the second day had passed from their ken—passed almost in silence, gibbering from time to time, smiling, plucking at his sleeves. A more pathetic sight Grey said he could not imagine, as he accompanied him to what the men called the calaboose. His umbrella was furled and carried for him; his Bible packed with his clothes; the boat which took him ashore a miracle in his eyes calling for chatter which no one understood.

For the rest he was dressed as all men are in the East; seemed amazed at the whiteness of his sleeves and came mincingly up the pier to the gharry they had prepared for him. So "tame" was he to the Dutch officials who took charge of him, they thought Captain Grey might safely take him home in his own vessel. Then arose an argument which was debated gravely as befits all legal questions. To what country must

he be sent, of what nation was he; who would be responsible for the charges incurred? Half English, one commented—by which the disputant meant Welsh, and half Afridi! Where is Afridi—is it Africa, perchance? Beyond the Khyber! Khyber! Gott in Himmel! an' dot is vere?

This, too, was explained. Neither Afghanistan nor India could legally be responsible for the man, in the last resort—and it must come to that seeing he is *non compos mentis*. That was accepted by some, disputed by others. Indeed so profound were the questions raised that Grey had visions of “this poor devil” as he now called him openly, “passing the rest of his life in cells on board liners, in the vain hope that some country might be found willing to “accept delivery!”

As a matter of fact Grey was now able to take a broader view of his handicap. The question of consanguinity no longer disturbed him. His father's statement had been so plain that Challoner made haste to give his opinion as soon as the message had been read—for the suggestion had troubled him also, as appeared when first it arose.

Now both Grey and Challoner had decided that Williams must be left behind—Grey for the sake of the ship, Challoner because he wished to remain in the *Kow-Loon* until she reached London. He had no wish to return to China; nor, on the other hand, to go to Australia, as he must if the skipper continued in the ship . . . while Miss Madeline had already threatened mutiny if either course were adopted.

When, therefore, someone said: “Isn't Stepney the sailors' parish—Stepney in East London?” and

someone else admitted it, Challoner put in a corroborative statement that was considered conclusive. Then said the first speaker: "Send him to Brisbane or Singapore by the first boat, and tranship him to London. Let them fight it out there." At which the Consul said: "So! Zey haff mouch money in London. Vy not?"

That seemed reasonable. Even a British Consul, who should know something of the law, acquiesced—on the ground no doubt that a Consul cannot be made responsible for torts; which in this case would have been difficult—for he was a German and loyal to Der Kaiser.

This duty accomplished, the Joss-pidgin being no longer a burden, Grey was free to find sailors and timber, or any other commodity necessary for the safe prosecution of the voyage; to pledge his Owners' credit and sign bills in their stead—which is not so easy in a foreign port as it appears. Then, when the sun was half-way to the horizon in the west, he again met Challoner who now escorted his daughter, and they took their way to the hotel for refreshment.

Madeline had been on a shopping expedition in which she had drawn the usual blank, yet did not seem disturbed. She said they had arrived just too late for the sales; or there had been a fire. However, she "had managed to secure some braid"—at which Challoner looked at Grey and Grey at Challoner—"there were other things naturally—and she had spent all her money. So when they got away she really would tackle the blankets"—a decision applauded by both men so readily that Miss Challoner decided it was

quite evident neither of them knew anything about dressmaking. Failing a success as tailoress there remained nothing for her but to visit the "slop-chest" and to pretend she was one of the crew.

Now when these matters were decided and tea finished they returned to the ship to write letters, and on the following evening hove up anchor, made sail and started on the home stretch. The men Grey had brought on board late the night before proved to be three Dutchmen, two Portuguese, one boy, said to be a Malay, and a grey-bearded officer who had not been home for ten years. Him they created second mate, so Cobham got his step as Chief, while Billee returned to his old rating as third now that he was sufficiently recovered to take duty.

So with a breeze from the eastward they slipped away from the straits and at noon on the next day had lost sight of the islands and were going free with fresh trades which would bring them nearly to the Cape in anything between five and six weeks.

But it was not until they drew near the thirteenth parallel that the blanket garment was completed and Madeline able to don a double-breasted coat for the approval of mankind, quite sure she might be proud of it. Grey had contributed uniform buttons, the braid was no longer a mystery; and to cap it was a close-fitting Tam-o'-shanter, made of the same material—set off by the wing feathers of a booby which a midshipman had surprised and captured soon after the trades came in. Naturally all hands vowed Miss Challoner a miracle. Even the Doctor had a few words of congratulation for his daughter; while

Billee, though loud in his praise of the whole scheme, failed to ask for a return of his coat.

But Grey had forestalled them all. He had seen the coat in many stages of imperfection. It began, really, when buttons were required. The only kind available at Kupang were, it appeared, impossible. Therefore Miss Challoner left them there. For Grey had many buttons—gold with a crown and anchor device—eminently suitable. Naturally he offered them, had them polished and now professed he was dazzled—as a man must surely who already was her slave. Whether it was at this time, or while engaged giving lessons in navigation, and explaining what had to be done with the sun's altitude at noon in order to discover where the ship stood at the moment ; or whether it was in the lengthier process of learning how to find the longitude and so “fix her off at noon,” it is impossible to say.

But it occurred.

Thereafter Madeline was so engrossed with navigation, that the men, talking the thing over, decided that if all the officers were washed overboard on the Aghullas Bank, they would trust her to bring them safe to the Ness without starting a rope yarn. They said, too, that it was obvious who was the Jonah on board all down China and Java Seas ; that nothing would persuade them ever to ship in a ship with a Joss-pidgin aft, unless there were a Miss Challoner to put him in his place. If he were forward, they would know what to do with him ; but aft, No.

Doctor Challoner, not being required to stand watch any longer, had taken to his old pursuits and was

engaged late, often till nearly midnight, before he took a final turn on the poop. Even then he did not ask to be amused. He said indeed his head was tired; sometimes that he was a bit fuzzy, so that they all allowed him to wander as he would.

So it came about quite naturally that after they had rounded the Cape, when Christmas was at hand and St Helena not far off, Grey one night went to see the Doctor before he started work.

On deck the watch were at the pumps, the Shanty-man singing one of his interminable songs. Grey had not considered which; for was he not concerned with the business of life at that moment? Indeed he walked on air and had the ease of a winged progress, having already received Madeline's word that Dad knew all about it, and if he didn't then he must be more blind than when he asked Mummie his question.

As it happened, Grey met the Doctor who was just beginning to pace up and down not far from where the cage once stood, and to him said just what it was essential to say to the man who was Madeline's father.

At that they began to walk, Challoner's hand resting on Grey's shoulder, his eyes on the deck, for perhaps two turns. Then it came, in the low, careful speech of a man of science:

"Naturally I expected something of this. I confess I am not surprised. My surprise would have been greater if you had failed to speak; but—I am going to be quite frank with you—what Mrs Challoner will say when she learns that Madeline aspires to 'a life on the ocean wave, and a home on the rolling deep,' I am not prepared to predict. . . .

"Personally I like the sea, for it makes one think;

but my wife does not. Personally I like sailors and soldiers; but my wife prefers professors. Personally I like you and your brother—I like you well enough to say that if Madeline wishes to take a few voyages before finally settling down at home—*both of you mind*—I shall not stand in your way nor cut her off with a shilling. . . . But my wife may tell another tale—so make the best of the short time left to you and remember that the future will hold no days more beautiful than these you are now entering. . . .”

Then, with a sidelong twist: “Bless me! what are they singing to-night?”

The words came up plainly enough as they halted:

‘Oh! Shanandoa I love your daughter,
Down by a rolling river,
Oh! Shanandoa I love your daughter,
Yet, away—we’re bound away,
’Cross the wide Missourie.”

“Apropos!” commented the Doctor. “We are bound away . . . bound away! like the ducklings on a pond while the old hen cackles alarm. By the way, who was Shanandoa? Or must one speak of him in the present tense?”

Grey did not know, nor was he deeply interested—so he said: “It is a capstan song, sir. Billee laughs at it, but we’re going to have some pukka music down aft. Won’t you join us?”

“I think, if you don’t mind,” he answered, “I will just pretend I am on watch. I’m one of those on the edge of the pond just now. . . . Um. Yes—I can think up here—and my love to the little girl. Don’t forget that!”

What else remains to be said? All voyages on the Atlantic are alike. More wind, less wind; calm, dead calm; cold, hot—it depends on what part you are in for that. To go one way is to cross the Pond, to go another is to go south-Spaining. Greek, every word, to the landsman.

Coming from the Cape as *Kow-Loon* came, there are the S.E. trades; you go booming along with stun's'ls set and begin to paint-ship. You pass or call at St Helena as you choose, pass Ascension far off to the eastward, come near the Line. Meet the doldrums, push thro' acres of Sargasso weed, see flying fish, Nautilus, pilot fish—sharks. Try to hook one, generally don't. You have squalls and calms in alternate hours, get drenched with rain, sit in the sun and dry—then come the N.E. trades and the stun's'l booms are stowed. You brace sharp up on the starboard tack and head as though you intended a visit to New York. Flying fish flop on board; you may fish from the boom-end for dolphin and bonito and sometimes succeed in landing one.

So you pass up the slope always heading N.W. until the trades fail and you lie slamming with your sails on a westerly swell which presently is followed by the breeze that shall carry you home. The painting and holy-stoning will all be done by this time, the ship like a new pin—all ready for the shore-gang to moil But if you are the skipper and engaged, the trades are Elysium.

You have gathered perhaps a dozen companions, perhaps fifty, while you lay waiting for the breeze, and when it came you started once more under all sail.

Stun's's again set, sky-scrapers, ringtails—all the old-fashioned gadgets to push you along in your race for the Lizard—the Holy Lizard of all homeward-bound ships in those days—then came the race up-Channel, the race to get the tug for which you have signalled, that may perchance be waiting under Dungeness.

And the weather will be cold.

It was cold when *Kow-Loon* came past the Wight, for it was January and she was like to get a cold reception, for she was 178 days from Hong-Kong. Still no one squealed, for the Seven Sisters, though clothed in white right over the Downs, were beautiful to the eyes of all on board. Who would have had it otherwise?

Not Madeline, facing it on the poop beside Grey and her father and Billee, clad in her blanket-coat which had taken so much making; not anyone of all those who had helped to bring the old ship back. . . . In spite of praying-wheels and Buddhist sacred *mantra*, standing in the old place over men's heads when they came aft to muster, *Kow-Loon* had returned to England—and England is always England to those who have wandered, and missed her.

Boston Public Library



3 9999 10503 038 9

MOVING WATERS

By Edward Noble

THIS is the story of two services and two brothers. Jag and Jimmy Haines are sailors, but while Jag is the captain of a merchant vessel, Jimmy is an officer in the Royal Navy. When war is declared, Jimmy fights on a war vessel, while Jag sails the seven seas with the status of a civilian and neither guns nor armor to protect him from the enemy.

With the sinking of a German submarine by Jag's ship he becomes a marked man, famous in London and infamous in Berlin. When he again receives his sailing orders and bids Dorothea Nesbit, his fiancée, good-bye, he does so with the full understanding that if he is captured, he will be hanged. The sinking of his ship, his imprisonment on board a submarine, and his last appeal to Jimmy bring the tale to a moving and unexpected conclusion.

MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE

THE HOUNDS OF GOD *By* RAFAEL SABATINI

A superb new novel of the days of the Inquisition by the 'prince of living story-tellers.'

THE RUNAGATES CLUB *By* JOHN BUCHAN

At the Runagates Club you will meet Sir Richard Hannay and other old friends, and hear of strange adventures of body and spirit.

RED IVORY *By* WALTON HALL SMITH

Another absorbing story of the Congo by the author of 'Shadow River.'

THE CROUCHING BEAST *By* VALENTINE WILLIAMS

A new and unusually exciting story of the famous Clubfoot.

THE ENTERPRISING BURGLAR *By* HEARNDEN BALFOUR

A fine new mystery story, by the author of 'A Gentleman from Texas.'

THE GOLEM *By* GUSTAV MEYRINK

250,000 copies of this remarkable novel have been sold in Germany. 'A symphony of fear.' — *London Spectator*.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY